

**Discovering Psychology Series**

# **Principles of Social Psychology**

## **2nd edition**

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# Part I. Setting the Stage

## Part I. Setting the Stage

# Module 1: Introduction to Social Psychology

# **Module 1: Introduction to Social Psychology**

## **Module Overview**

In our first module we will examine the field of social psychology and how it relates to personality psychology and differs from sociology by clarifying the level of analysis and differences in methods used. We will then embark upon a historical journey to see where the field has come from and where it is going. Finally, we will examine professional societies and journals as they relate to social psychology and share links to blogs and newsfeeds on current research in this subfield.

## **Module Outline**

- 1.1. What is Social Psychology?
- 1.2. Social Psychology...Then
- 1.3. Social Psychology...Now
- 1.4. Connecting with Other Social Psychologists

## **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Clarify similarities and differences between social psychology, personality psychology, and sociology.
- Outline the history of social psychology.
- Describe the status of the subfield today....and in the future.
- Identify ways in which social psychologists can connect with one another.

## 1.1. What is Social Psychology?

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define psychology and deconstruct the definition.
- Define social.
- Contrast social psychology and sociology.
- Clarify how social and personality psychology intersect.
- Describe general methods used by social psychologists.
- Distinguish between basic and applied science.
- Compare and contrast how social psychology, sociology, and personality psychology tackle the same general issue by evaluating empirical articles from a journal in each field.

#### 1.1.1. Defining Terms

Our discussion of social psychology will start by defining a few key terms, or what social and psychology mean separately. We will tackle the latter, then the former, and then put it all together. First up, the latter. **Psychology** is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Yes, that is correct. Psychology is *scientific*. Psychology utilizes the same scientific process and methods used by disciplines such as biology and chemistry. We will discuss this in more detail in Module 2 so please just keep this in the back of your mind for now. Second, it is the study of behavior and mental processes. Psychology desires to not only understand why people engage in the behavior that they do, but also how. What is going on in the brain to control the movement of our arms and legs when running downfield to catch the game winning touchdown, what affects the words we choose to say when madly in love, how do we interpret an event as benign or a threat when a loud sound is heard, and what makes an individual view another group in less than favorable terms? These are just a few of the questions that we ask as psychologists.

Now to the former – social. According to Oxford Dictionaries online, **social** is defined as relating to society or its organization. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “tending to form cooperative and interdependent relationships with others” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social>). Another form of the word implies a desire to be around people such as being a social butterfly. Really, both forms of the word are useful for the discussion to come in this textbook.

We now address their combination. **Social psychology** is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes as they relate to how people interact with, or relate to, others. Our starting point is on the person, and not society. The latter is the focus of the field called **sociology**, or the study of society or groups, both large and small. According to the American Sociological Association (<http://www.asanet.org/>), sociology is a social science which involves studying the social lives of people, groups, and societies; studying our behavior as social beings; scientifically investigating social aggregations; and is “an overarching unification of all studies of humankind, including history, psychology, and economics.”

In contrast, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (Division 8 of the American Psychological Association; <https://www.apa.org/about/division/div8.aspx>; SPSP) defines social psychology as the “scientific study of how people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.” The study of social psychology occurs in a social context meaning the individual as they relate to others and is affected by others.

Personality and social psychology go hand-in-hand and so we should define personality psychology too. Simply, **personality psychology** is the scientific study of individual differences



in people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and how these come together as a whole. A social psychologist may investigate whether an individual helped another person due to a situational or personal factor, while a personality psychologist would examine whether a certain personality type is more likely to make situational or dispositional attributions or look for traits that govern helping behavior.

### **1.1.2. How Social Psychologists Do Their Work?**

The answer to the question guiding this section is really quite simple – *observation*. Psychology, as most fields in science, operates by observing the world around the observer. We take note of the actions of others in relation to tragic events such as a natural disaster or school shooting, how lovers behave in public and query them about their actions behind close doors, and a person's reaction to the opening of a new restaurant or receiving poor service (and subsequent tipping behavior). Observation alone is not enough.

Once we take note of these different types of behaviors, we have to find a way to *measure* it and eventually *record* the behavior. If we want to study public displays of affection (PDAs) we have to clearly state what these displays are or how they will appear so we know for sure that they have occurred. This might be a gentle touch, an embrace, a passionate kiss or maybe just a quick one. Once we know what it is we are observing, we can record its occurrence in a notebook, through the use of a video recorder, in conjunction with another observer, or with a golf stroke counter.

Finally, scientists seek to *manipulate* the conditions in which people experience the world to see what the effect is on their social behavior. This is the hallmark of experimentation as you will come to see in Module 2.

So how do social psychologists do what they do? They observe the world, measure and record behavior, and then manipulate the conditions under which such behavior may occur so that they can make causal statements about social behavior.

### 1.1.3. Two Forms Their Work Might Take

Science has two forms – basic/pure and applied. **Basic science** is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge for the sake of the knowledge and nothing else while **applied science** desires to find solutions to real-world problems. You might think of it like this – the researcher decides on a question to investigate in pure science, but an outside source identifies the research question/problem in applied science. Of course, this is not always the case. A social psychologist doing basic research may focus on questions related to people's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings such as why do people treat outgroup members differently than ingroup members, why do first impressions matter so much, why do we help people in some situations but not others, and why are we attracted to some people but not others? Applied social scientists would in turn use this research to develop K-12 programs to promote the toleration of those who are different than us, help people interviewing for a job to make a good first impression, develop stealthy interventions that encourage altruistic behavior, or encourage people to interact favorably with all regardless of our attraction to them.

As the Society for Personality and Social Psychology states on their website, “Of course, the distinction between basic and applied research is often a fuzzy one. One can certainly perform basic research in applied domains, and the findings from each type of research enrich the other. Indeed, it would be fair to say that most personality and social psychologists have both basic and applied interests” (<http://www.spsp.org/about/what-socialpersonality-psychology>).

#### **1.1.4. Comparing the Approach to Research Across Three Disciplines**

**1.1.4.1. Exploring a social issue.** One way to really understand the differences between the seemingly inter-related disciplines of social psychology, personality psychology, and sociology is to explore how each deal with a specific social issue. For the purposes of our discussion, we will tackle the obesity epidemic.

**1.1.4.2. Sociology.** Our focus will be on the article “Obesity is in the eye of the beholder: BMI and socioeconomic outcomes across cohorts” written by Vida Maralani and Douglas McKee of Cornell University in 2017 and published in the journal *Sociological Science*. The study begs the question of whether the threshold for being “too fat” is a static or fluid concept as it pertains to socioeconomic outcomes. The researchers used two nationally representative birth cohorts of Americans from the 1979 and 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The sample from 1979 included 5,890 respondents aged 14 to 22 and the 1997 sample included 6,082 participants aged 12 to 17. The relationship between body mass and the socioeconomic outcomes of wages, the probability of being married, and total family income were studied across the domains of work and marriage. In the two cohorts the authors analyzed the outcomes separately for each of four social groups (white men, black men, white women, and black women).

The results showed that the patterns for those who are considered “too fat” or “too thin” differ systematically by gender, race, and social outcome, and “...the association between BMI and social outcomes is often not constant within the ranges of the standard cutoffs...” (pg. 310). For white men, outcomes were worse at higher BMIs while at low and lower-middle BMIs outcomes improved. For white women, meaningful patterns emerged for being quite thin rather than excessively or moderately fat. As the authors say, “The patterns for all women in the 1979 cohort and white women in the 1997 cohort remind us that norms of thinness dominate women’s lives at work and at home. But, we are also struck by the evidence that a body ideal operates for white men in multiple domains as well” (pg. 313).

For all groups the researchers found that the association between BMI and being married weakens across the two cohorts. It may be that as BMI has increased for all groups, we have become accepting of marrying partners who are larger. One stereotype of black men is that they are more accepting of larger women than are white men. The results did not support this notion and in fact, the data suggested that a body ideal of thinness existed for both white and black women in the 1979 cohort.

And finally, the authors end the article by saying, “The relationship between body size and socioeconomic outcomes depends on who is being judged, who is doing the judging, and in which social domain. Rather than using the medical conceptualization of obesity, it is important to recognize that “too fat” is a subjective, contingent, and fluid judgment in the social world” (pg. 314).

Source: Maralani, V., & McKee, D. (2017). Obesity is in the eye of the beholder: BMI and socioeconomic outcomes across cohorts. *Sociological Science*, 4, 288-317.

**1.1.4.3. Social psychology.** Our focus for social psychology will be on the article entitled, “Disgust predicts prejudice and discrimination toward individuals with obesity” written by Lenny Vartanian and Tara Trewarth of UNSW Australia and Eric Vanman of The University of Queensland and published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* in 2016. The authors start by pointing out that there has been a recent shift toward studying the emotions underlying prejudicial beliefs toward individuals with obesity, with a focus on the intergroup emotions of disgust, contempt, and anger. The authors cited research suggesting that the specific emotion elicited by a group was dependent on the threat posed by another group. Since obese individuals are not generally seen as threatening to others or as infringing on the freedom of others, they are less likely to elicit anger as an emotion and more likely to elicit disgust and maybe contempt.

The study by Vartanian et al. (2016) included 598 participants who were predominantly male and Caucasian, had a mean age of 35.88, and a BMI of 26.39. They were randomly assigned to view a photograph of either an obese female or a female with a healthy weight. Information was also given about the target and her daily activities such as being age 35, owning a pet, and enjoying shopping. Participants indicated to what extent they felt disgust, contempt, and anger toward the target individual on a visual analogue scale with possible scores ranging from 0 or Not at all to 100 or Extremely. Attitude was measured on a 7-point scale, the target individual was measured on a series of common obesity stereotypes such as being lazy or lacking self-discipline, social distance or how willing the participant would be to approach the target individual was measured on a 4-point scale, and participants completed an online version of the Seating Distance task as a measure of avoidance.

Results showed that disgust was expressed primarily toward the obese target, and participants held more negative attitudes, negative stereotypes, and saw this person as less competent than the healthy target. There was a greater desire for social distance from the obese target as well. The authors note that obese individuals often report being excluded or ignored, and previous bias-reduction efforts have largely failed. One explanation for these trends might be disgust. In terms of the failed interventions, modifying people's cognitions are unlikely to change their emotional experiences. Hence a future challenge for researchers will be to find ways to change people's emotional reactions to individuals with obesity.

*Note that this article is a great example of the overlap many researchers have in terms of doing basic and applied research mentioned at the end of Section 1.1.3.*

Source: Vartanian, L. R., Trewartha, T., & Vanman, E. J. (2016). Disgust predicts prejudice and discrimination toward individuals with obesity. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 46(6), 369-375.

**1.1.4.4. Personality psychology.** And finally, we will examine the article, "Personality traits and body mass index: Modifiers and mechanisms" written by Angelina Sutin and Antonio Terracciano of Florida State University and published in *Psychological Health* in 2016. The authors start by noting there is growing evidence that personality traits contribute to body weight with Conscientiousness related to a healthier BMI and Neuroticism having a positive association with BMI (meaning as one becomes more neurotic one weights more – higher BMI). Of course,

physical activity is linked to lower body weight and individuals high in Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability tend to be more active.

The researchers obtained a sample of 5,150 participants who were on average 44.61 years old and mostly non-Hispanic European American. They completed the Big Five Inventory as an assessment of personality; reported their height and weight as an indicator of BMI; completed a behavioral questionnaire about their eating and physical activity habits over the past 30 days; and reported whether they had ever been diagnosed with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, stroke, or high blood pressure.

Consistent with previous research, Neuroticism and Conscientiousness were most strongly related to BMI but more so for women than men, and in the expected direction. Additionally, those scoring higher on Activity, a facet of Extraversion, had a lower BMI. In terms of age, older participants who scored higher on Agreeableness had a lower BMI and though the protective effects of Conscientiousness were present for all, the association was slightly stronger for older participants. The authors explained, “Participants who were more emotionally stable, extraverted, open, agreeable, and conscientious reported eating healthier food, and less convenience food, engaging in more physical activity, and eating at regular intervals at the same time each day” (pg. 7). The study showed that as obesity goes, personality leads people to engage in specific behaviors that increases or decreases their risk of becoming obese and gaining weight.

Source: Sutin, A. R., & Terracciano, A. (2016). Personality traits and body mass index: modifiers and mechanisms. *Psychology & health*, 31(3), 259-275.

### **For Further Consideration**

Now that you have read about the three different articles, what differences do you notice in how social psychology, personality psychology, and sociology approach the same phenomena (i.e. obesity)? Are there methodological differences? How do they talk about the topic? Is the focus top down or bottom up? How do the different subfields (really psychology and sociology though you can distinguish between personality and social) frame their conclusions and the implications of what they discovered?

If possible, please read the articles. If you cannot obtain the article from your school library, your instructor may be able to.

## **1.2. Social Psychology...Then**

### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Define philosophy.
- Outline the four branches of philosophy.
- Hypothesize possible links between psychology and philosophy based on the four branches.
- Contrast the methods used by philosophy and psychology.
- List and describe philosophical worldviews that have impacted the field of psychology and clarify how.
- Clarify the importance of physiology for the development of psychology as a separate field.
- Identify the founder of psychology and the importance of his work.
- Clarify why identifying a clear founder for social psychology is difficult.
- List and describe the work of noteworthy social psychologists throughout history.



### 1.2.1. Unexpected Origins

**1.2.1.1. Philosophy.** Psychology arose out of **philosophy**, which is defined as the love and pursuit of knowledge. Philosophy divides itself into four main branches, each posing questions psychology addresses today as well. *Metaphysics* is the study of the nature of reality, what reality is like, what exists in the world, and how it is ordered. Key questions center on the existence of a higher power, what truth is, what a person is, whether all events are governed by fate or we have a free will, and causality or whether one event causes another. *Epistemology* is the study of knowledge and seeks to understand how we know what we know. *Ethics* concerns matters related to what we ought to do or what is best to do and asks what is good, what makes actions or people good, and how should we treat others. Finally, *logic* focuses on the nature and structure of arguments and determining whether a piece of reasoning is good or bad.

So how do these four branches link to psychology? Well, our field tries to understand people and how their mind works. We wonder why they do what they did (as you will come to see we call this an attribution) and look for causal relationships. In terms of fate vs. free will, we ask if what we will be throughout life is determined in childhood, and during a time when we cannot make many choices for ourselves. Consider an adult who holds prejudicial views of another group. Did growing up in a house where such attitudes were taught and reinforced on a near daily basis make it for certain a person would express the same beliefs later in life? Issues such as this show how psychology links to philosophy. As well, we study the elements of cognition such as schemas and propositions, how we learn, and types of thinking which falls under epistemology. As you will see, schemas are important to social identity theory and the assignment of people into groups or categories. Psychologists also study the proper and improper

use of punishment, moral development, and obedience all of which fall under the branch of philosophy called ethics as well as decision making and the use of heuristics which involves logic.

The main difference, and an important one, between philosophy and psychology is in terms of the methods that are used. Philosophy focuses on speculation, intuition, and generalization from personal observation while psychology relies on experimentation and measurement, both of which were mentioned in Section 1.1.2, and in Module 2 we will discuss its main research methods of observation, case study, correlation, survey, and the experiment.

Philosophy has several worldviews which have played a direct role in the development of our field and some of its key ideas. First, **dualism** is the idea that questions whether the mind and body are distinct from one another and Rene Descartes (1596-1650) tackled this issue. Before Descartes it was believed that the mind influenced the body but the body had little effect on the mind. Descartes, on the other hand, said that both mind and body affected one another. This brought about a change in what was studied and how it was studied. Attention shifted away from the soul to the scientific study of the mind and mental processes.

Next, **mechanism** was the underlying philosophy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and remained influential until the mid-1900s. It proposed that the world is a great machine. All-natural processes were thought to be mechanically determined and so could be explained by the laws of physics and chemistry. Due to mechanism, observation and experimentation became key features of science, with measurement following closely behind. People were thought to be like machines and mechanical contraptions called **automata** were created to imitate human movement and action. These machines were incredibly precise and regular.

**Determinism** is another philosophical worldview that has been important to psychology. It is the idea that every act is determined or caused by past events and so it is possible to predict changes that will occur in the operation of the universe. Why might this be important for science? Simply, determinism leads us to causal statements and in research, we seek to make such statements. It tells us that if A occurs, B follows. Prediction is the key here. Also important is **reductionism** or breaking things down to their basic components which is the hallmark of science itself.

Though other philosophical ideas are important too, we will conclude by mentioning **empiricism** or the idea that all knowledge is derived from sensory experience. Several famous empiricists were influential on psychology to include Locke, Berkley, Hartley, and John Stuart Mill. Empiricism includes the idea of the *tabula rasa* or the blank slate upon which experience is written. Hence, there are no innate ideas that we are born with. Mill proposed the interesting idea of a **creative synthesis** in which there is a combining of mental elements such that the product yields some distinct quality not present in the individual elements themselves. He said it is like a mental chemistry.

**1.2.1.2. Physiology.** It is important to note that psychology did not just rise out of philosophy, but also from physiology. The mid to late 1800s provided many remarkable findings about the functioning of the human brain. During this time we discovered what the cerebrum, midbrain, cerebellum, and medulla did thanks to the work of Flourens, began using electrical stimulation and the *extirpation method* (determining function by destroying a specific structure in the brain and then observing changes in behavior), discovered white and gray matter courtesy of Franz Josef Gall, realized that the nervous system was a conductor of electrical impulses, and

determined that nerve fibers were composed of neurons and synapses. Key figures included people like von Helmholtz who studied the speed of neural impulse and correctly determined it to be 90 feet per second, Weber who proposed the concepts of two-point thresholds and the just noticeable difference (jnd), and Fechner who founded the field of psychophysics and proposed the absolute and difference thresholds. These figures showed how topics central to the new science of psychology could be studied empirically, provided a method for investigating the relationship between mind and body, and gave psychology precise and elegant measurement techniques.

### **1.2.2. The Birth of a Field**

The field of psychology did not formally organize itself until 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt founded his laboratory at Leipzig, Germany. Wundt studied sensation and perception and began experimental psychology as a science. He employed the use of *introspection*, or the examination of one's own mental state, which is used today after being almost discarded as a method by the behaviorists throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This method gave him precise experimental control over the conditions under which introspection was used. He established rigorous training of his observers and focused on objective measures provided by the use of sophisticated laboratory equipment, in keeping with the traditions of physiology. Wundt's brand of psychology would give rise to the school of thought called Structuralism in the United States under Titchener and eventually stirred a rebellion in the form of Behaviorism and Gestalt psychology, though a discussion of how this occurred is beyond the scope of this book.

### 1.2.3. The Birth of Social Psychology

So, who might be considered the founder of social psychology? A few different answers are possible, starting with Norman Triplett who late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century published the first empirical research article in social psychology. He was interested in whether the presence of others might affect a person's performance on a task. To answer the question, he compared how fast children would reel when alone and when competing with another child. His study showed that the “bodily presence of another contestant participating simultaneously in the race serves to liberate latent energy not ordinarily available.” To read Triplett's 1898 article, please visit:

<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Triplett/>

Another candidate for founder is Maximilien Ringelmann, a French agricultural engineer, who conducted some of the earliest experiments in social psychology dating back to the 1880s. He found that people become less productive as the size of their group increases. He called this the “Ringelmann effect.”

The findings of these two individuals are interesting, and contradictory. In the case of Triplett, the presence of others improves performance but Ringelmann showed that the presence of others hinders performance. So which is it? As you will come to see it is both. What Triplett described is today called *social facilitation* while Ringelmann's work is called *social loafing*. We will discuss this further in Module 8.

The production of research articles usually does not merit receiving the distinction of being a founder. Sometimes, a better indicator is the production of a textbook bearing the name of that area and to that end, it is necessary to give credit to William McDougall who wrote his textbook, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* in 1908, Edward Ross who also wrote a book in

1908, and Floyd Allport who completed his book in 1924. Though Allport's book was written 16 years after Ross and McDougall's books, it is especially important since it emphasized how people respond to stimuli in the environment, such as groups, and called for the use of experimental procedures and the scientific method which contrasted with Ross and McDougall's more philosophical approaches.

One final individual is worth mentioning. Kurt Lewin, a noted Gestalt psychologist, proposed the idea of field theory and the life space, and is considered the founder of modern social psychology. He did work in the area of group dynamics and emphasized social action research on topics such as integrated housing, equal employment opportunities, and the prevention of prejudice in childhood. He promoted sensitivity training for educators and business leaders.

#### **1.2.4. Noteworthy Social Psychologists**

To round out our discussion of the history of social psychology, we wish to note some of the key figures in the subfield and provide a brief historical context as to when they worked. With that in mind, we begin with *Francis Sumner (1895-1954)* who was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in psychology, which he earned from Clark University in 1920. Sumner went on to establish the field of Black psychology.

*Solomon Asch (1907-1996)* is most well-known for his studies on conformity and the finding that a large number of people will conform to the group even if the group's position on an issue is clearly wrong. He also published on the primacy effect and the halo effect. *Gordon Allport (1897-1967)*, younger brother to the aforementioned Floyd Allport, conducted research

on prejudice, religion, and attitudes, and trained famous psychologists such as Milgram and Jerome Bruner. He also helped to form the field of personality psychology.

From 1939 to 1950, *Mamie (1917-1983) and Kenneth (1914-2005) Clark* conducted important research on the harmful effects of racial segregation and showed that Black children preferred not only to play with white dolls but also “colored the line drawing of the child a shade lighter than their own skin.” Their research was used by the Supreme Court in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954 that ended the racial segregation of public schools and overturned the 1892 decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson which legitimized “separate but equal” educations for White and Black students. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has the tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system.

Kenneth Clark was also the first African American to be elected President of the American Psychological Association. For more on the landmark case, please visit:

<https://www.apa.org/research/action/segregation.aspx>

*Leon Festinger (1919-1989)* is best known for his theory of cognitive dissonance and social comparison theory while *Irving Janis (1918-1990)* conducted research on attitude change,

groupthink, and decision making. *Stanley Schachter (1922-1997)* proposed the two-factor theory of emotion which states that emotions are a product of physiological arousal and the cognitive interpretation of that arousal. *Carolyn (1922-1982) and Muzafer (1906-1988) Sherif* are known for the Robbers Cave experiment which divided boys at a summer camp into two groups who overcame fierce intergroup hostility by working towards superordinate goals.

During the Nuremberg trials after World War II, many German soldiers were asked why they would do many of the unspeakable crimes they were accused of. The simple response was that they were told to. This led *Stanley Milgram (1933-1984)* to see if they were correct. Through a series of experiments in the 1960s he found that participants would shock a learner to death, despite their protests, because they were told to continue by the experimenter. He also did work on the small-world phenomenon, lost letter experiment, and the cyranoid method.

To learn about other key figures in the history of social psychology, please visit:

<https://www.socialpsychology.org/social-figures.htm>



### 1.3. Social Psychology...Now

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe current trends in social neuroscience as they relate to social psychology.
- Describe current trends in evolutionary psychology as they relate to social psychology.
- Describe current trends in cross-cultural research as they relate to social psychology.
- Describe current trends in technology as they relate to social psychology.

Social psychology's growth continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and social neuroscience, evolutionary explanations, cross-cultural research, and the internet are trending now. How so?

#### 1.3.1. Social Neuroscience

Emerging in the early 1990s, there is a new emphasis on cognitive processes which has led to the formation of the interdisciplinary field of **social neuroscience** or how the brain affects our social behavior and is affected by it (Lieberman, 2010). So how do social psychology and social neuroscience form their own separate identities? Cacioppo, Berntson, and Decety (2010) state that social neuroscience studies “neural, hormonal, cellular, and genetic mechanisms and, relatedly, to the study of the associations and influences between social and biological levels of organization” and where human beings fit into the broader biological context.” Though social psychology does study biological factors, its emphasis has traditionally been on situational factors and dispositional factors through its collaboration with personality psychologists. Both social neuroscience and social psychology focus on social behavior and so can be aligned and make meaningful contributions to constructs and theories presented in the other. The authors clear up any concern about overlap by saying, “The emphasis in each is sufficiently different that

neither field is in danger of being reduced to or replaced by the other, but articulating the different levels of analysis can provide a better understanding of complex social phenomena.”

Specific contributions of social neuroscience include imaging the working human brain through such methods as “multi-modal structural, hemodynamic, and electrophysiological brain imaging acquisition and analysis techniques; more sophisticated specifications and analyses of focal brain lesions; focused experimental manipulations of brain activity using transcranial magnetic stimulation and pharmacological agents; and emerging visualization and quantitative techniques that integrate anatomical and functional connectivity.” These methods have paved the way for increased understanding of the greatest asset human beings have and move us away from having to make analogies from animals to humans courtesy of brain lesion studies and electrophysiological recording and the postmortem examinations of human brains.

Social neuroscience is an effort of biological, cognitive, and social scientists to collaborate in a more systematic way and all share “a common belief that the understanding of mind and behavior could be enhanced by an integrative analysis that encompasses levels of organization ranging from genes to cultures.” From it, several subareas have emerged to include cultural neuroscience, social developmental neuroscience, comparative social neuroscience, social cognitive neuroscience, and social affective neuroscience.

Cacioppo, Berntson, and Decety (2010) conclude, “The field of social neuroscience, therefore, represents an interdisciplinary perspective that embraces animal as well as human research, patient as well as nonpatient research, computational as well as empirical analyses, and neural as well as behavioral studies.”

To read the whole article, please visit: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3883133/>

Citation: Cacioppo, J. T., Berntson, G. G., & Decety, J. (2010). Social neuroscience and its relationship to social psychology. *Social Cognition*, 28(6), 675-685.

### 1.3.2. Evolutionary Explanations

Any behavior that exists today does so because it offers an evolutionary advantage to the species as a whole. Though not its own distinct branch of psychology, **evolutionary psychology** is impacting all subfields. So what is it? According to David Buss, Professor of Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, it is based on four premises:

1. Evolutionary processes have affected and shaped both body and brain, in terms of psychological mechanisms and the behaviors that are produced
2. Many of these mechanisms are adaptations to solve problems that contribute to the survival of the species
3. These adaptations are activated in modern environments that differ in important ways from ancestral environments
4. Psychological mechanisms having adaptive functions is a critical and necessary ingredient for psychology to be comprehensive

Buss goes on to describe specific ways evolutionary psychology has informed the various subfields. In relation to our discussion of social psychology he says it has “produced a wealth of discoveries, ranging from adaptations for altruism to the dark sides of social conflict.”

Evolutionary psychology is also helping to discover adaptive individual differences through its

interaction with personality psychology. In relation to our previous discussion of social neuroscience, Buss says, “Cognitive and social neuroscientists, for example, use modern technologies such as fMRI to test hypotheses about social exclusion adaptations, emotions such as sexual jealousy, and kin recognition mechanisms.”

For more on Buss’ comments, and those of other researchers in relation to evolutionary theory and psychology, please visit the APA science briefs:

<https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2009/05/sci-brief.aspx>

### **1.3.3. Cross-Cultural Research**

Quite possibly the most critical trend in social psychology today is the realization that it is completely cultural. In 1972, the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology was founded and today has a membership of over 800 individuals in over 65 countries. The group’s primary aim is to study the intersection of culture and psychology. The group publishes the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (to learn more about them, visit: <http://iaccp.org/>). In 1977, Harry Triandis published the article, “Cross-cultural Social and Personality Psychology” and outlined the study of cultural influences on social behavior.

Singelis (2000) predicted a continued and increasing interest in cross-cultural social psychology due to a rise of a multi-cultural Zeitgeist in the United States courtesy of the civil rights movement, more sophisticated quantitative methods in cross-cultural research which have proven to be more acceptable to those trained in social psychology’s scientific tradition, and a

greater acceptance of qualitative methods which is necessary to understanding cultural meanings. This will lead to a redefining of what the self means (the topic of Module 3) since it is shaped by cultural context and influences social behavior through a person's values, evaluations, and perceptions. The self now includes the East Asian conception of it being interdependent. Additionally, Singelis (2000) predicts new constructs will emerge that "combine seemingly opposite orientations in an integrative synthesis that is contrary to the typical Cartesian-like dichotomy" and a "shift away from individually oriented constructs toward those that capture social relationships." Examples include the autonomous-relational self which synthesizes autonomy and human relationships, relational harmony or the degree of harmony in the person's five most important relationships, and social oriented achievement motivation which includes the Western concept of self-realization and the non-Western idea of achievement motivation including others whose boundaries are not distinct from the self.

Singelis (2000) concludes, "The increasing interest in culture, the rise in the number of psychologists outside the United States, and the willingness to consider many variables and points of view will keep cross-cultural social psychology vital and dynamic into the 21<sup>st</sup> century." A more recent trend is **multi-cultural research** which focused on racial and ethnic diversity within cultures.

#### **1.3.4. The Internet**

In Section 1.2.3, and later in this book, we described early work on social loafing. Did you know that employers have recognized that social loafing in the workplace is serious enough of an issue that they now closely monitor what their employees are doing, in relation to surfing

the web, online shopping, playing online games, managing finances, searching for another job, checking Facebook, sending a text, or watching Youtube videos? They are, and the phenomenon is called *cyberloafing*. Employees are estimated to spend from three hours a week up to 2.5 hours a day cyberloafing. So what can employers do about it? Kim, Triana, Chung, and Oh (2015) reported that employees high in the personality trait of Conscientiousness are less likely to cyberloaf when they perceive greater levels of organizational justice. So they recommend employers to screen candidates during the interview process for conscientiousness and emotional stability, develop clear policies about when personal devices can be used, and “create appropriate human resource practices and effectively communicate with employees so they feel people are treated fairly” (Source: <https://news.wisc.edu/driven-to-distraction-what-causes-cyberloafing-at-work/>). Cyberloafing should be distinguished from leisure surfing which Matthew McCarter of The University of Texas at San Antonio says can relieve stress and help employees recoup their thoughts (Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/01/160120111527.htm>).

Myers (2016) points out that human beings have a need to belong and when we are alone, we suffer. Today, technology connects us in new and very important ways. He cites research showing that a teenager in the U.S. sends and receives 30 text per day, most teens prefer to use “fingered speech” over talking on the phone, and nearly half of all people in the world use the internet on a daily basis. So what is good about the internet? E-commerce, telecommuting, finding love, and obtaining information are clear benefits. In fact, online romances have been found to last longer since both individuals engage in greater levels of self-disclosure and share values and interests (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Joinson, 2001a; Joinson, 2001b). How likely are people to give out personal information to someone they do not know? Research shows that trust

is key. When we trust we are more likely to accede to a request for personal information (Joinson, Reips, Buchanan, & Schofield, 2010). Costs include *deindividuation* or faceless anonymity, time lost from face-to-face relationships, self-segregation which leads to group polarization, and what Myers (2016) calls “slacktivism” or, “the effortless signing of online petitions or sharing of prosocial videos may substitute feel-good Internet clicks for real, costly helping.” This ties into the cyberloafing information presented above.

For more on the Myers (2016) article, please visit:

<http://www.davidmyers.org/davidmyers/assets/SocialPsychologyInternet.pdf>

#### Additional Resources:

- Psychology Today – Introduction to Internet Psychology -  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-social-net/201302/introduction-internet-psychology>
- APA – Children and Internet Use -  
<https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2003/12/jackson.aspx>
- Psychology and the Internet (book) -  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780123694256/psychology-and-the-internet>

## 1.4. Connecting with Other Social Psychologists

### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify what it means to communicate findings.
- Identify professional societies in social psychology.
- Identify publications in social psychology.

One of the functions of science is to *communicate* findings. Testing hypotheses, developing sound methodology, accurately analyzing data, and drawing cogent conclusions are important, but you must tell others what you have done too. This is accomplished via joining professional societies and submitting articles to peer reviewed journals. Below are some of the societies and journals important to social psychology.

### 1.4.1. Professional Societies

- **American Psychological Association → Division 8: Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP)**
  - Website - <https://www.apa.org/about/division/div8.aspx>
  - Mission Statement – “Division 8: Society for Personality and Social Psychology seeks to advance the progress of theory, basic and applied research, and practice in the field of personality and social psychology. Members are employed in academia and private industry or government, and all are concerned with how individuals affect and are affected by other people and by their social and physical environments.”
  - Publication – Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (monthly) and Personality and Social Psychology Review (quarterly)
  - Other Information – “Membership in SPSP is open to students and those whose work focuses largely in social/personality psychology. Members



receive discounts to the SPSP Convention, access to three journals, access to the SPSP Job Board, and much more.”

○ **Society of Experimental and Social Psychology**

- Website - <https://www.sesp.org/>
- Mission Statement – “The Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP) is an international scientific organization dedicated to the advancement of social psychological research. Our typical members have Ph.D.s in social psychology, and work in academic or other research settings.”
- Publication - Social Psychological and Personality Science
- Other Information – “One of the main ways that SESP furthers its goal is by holding an annual scientific meeting in the early fall of each year, publishing the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science, supporting the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, and contributing to advocacy efforts as a member of FABBS (the Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences). SESP was founded in 1965 by a group of social psychologists led by Edwin Hollander and W. Edgar Vinacke, as described in Hollander (1968). SESP currently boasts over 1000 elected members.”

○ **European Association of Social Sociology**

- Website - <https://www.easp.eu/>
- Mission Statement – “The overarching aim of the European Association of Social Psychology is straightforward: to promote excellence in European research in the field of social psychology. As the history of the Association demonstrates, the objectives of those who founded the Association were to improve the quality of social psychological research in Europe by promoting greater contact among researchers in different European countries.”
- Publication – European Journal of Social Psychology
- Other Information – “It is a tradition of the EASP to honour members who make an outstanding contribution to the discipline. Every three years, on the

occasion of the General Meeting, one member receives the Tajfel Medal and is invited to deliver the Henri Tajfel Lecture. This recognizes the contribution of a senior researcher to the field of social psychology over the course of their lifetime. In 2017 we will, for the first time, grant a Moscovici award to honour the author(s) of an outstanding theoretical contribution to the field.”

- **Association for Research in Personality**

- Website - <http://www.personality-arp.org/>
- Mission Statement – “Founded in 2001, ARP’s mission is a scientific organization devoted to bringing together scholars whose research contributes to the understanding of personality structure, development, and dynamics. From 2001 through 2008, ARP met annually as an SPSP preconference. Since 2009, we have held a stand-alone biennial conference.”
- Publication – ARP is a co-sponsor of Social Psychological and Personality Science
- Other Information – “The ARP Emerging Scholar Award is presented biennially to recognize exceptionally high quality work from emerging personality psychologists. To be eligible for the award, nominees must be a graduate student or postdoctoral member of ARP. The ARP Executive Board established this award in 2018.”

#### **1.4.2. Publications**

- **The Journal of Social Psychology**

- Website: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vsoc20>
- Published by: Taylor and Francis
- Description: “Since John Dewey and Carl Murchison founded it in 1929, *The Journal of Social Psychology* has published original empirical research in all areas of basic and applied social psychology. Most articles report laboratory or field research in core areas of social and organizational psychology including the self and social identity, person perception and social cognition,

attitudes and persuasion, social influence, consumer behavior, decision making, groups and teams, stereotypes and discrimination, interpersonal attraction and relationships, prosocial behavior, aggression, organizational behavior, leadership, and cultural psychology.”

○ **The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**

- Website: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/psp/>
- Published by: American Psychological Association
- Description: “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology publishes original papers in all areas of personality and social psychology and emphasizes empirical reports, but may include specialized theoretical, methodological, and review papers.” The journal has three independently edited sections: Attitudes and Social Cognition, Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes, and Personality Processes and Individual Differences.”

○ **Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin**

- Website: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/psp>
- Published by: Division 8 of APA: Society for Personality and Social Psychology
- Description: “*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (PSPB)*, published monthly, is an official journal for the Society of Personality and Social Psychology. *PSPB* offers an international forum for the rapid dissemination of original empirical papers in all areas of personality and social psychology.”

○ **Personality and Social Psychology Review**

- Website: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/psr>
- Published by: Division 8 of APA: Society for Personality and Social Psychology

- Description: “Personality and Social Psychology Review (*PSPR*) is the premiere outlet for original theoretical papers and conceptual review articles in all areas of personality and social psychology. *PSPR* offers stimulating conceptual pieces that identify exciting new directions for research on the psychological underpinnings of human individuality and social functioning, as well as comprehensive review papers that provide new, integrative frameworks for existing theory and research programs.”

○ **Social Psychological and Personality Science**

- Website: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/social-psychological-and-personality-science>
- Published by: Wiley
- Description: “*SPPS* is a unique short reports journal in social and personality psychology. Its aim is to publish concise reports of empirical studies that provide meaningful contributions to our understanding of important issues in social and personality psychology. *SPPS* strives to publish innovative, rigorous, and impactful research. It is geared toward a speedy review and publication process to allow groundbreaking research to become part of the scientific conversation quickly.”

○ **Journal of Experimental Social Psychology**

- Website: <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-experimental-social-psychology/>
- Published by: Elsevier
- Description: “The *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology (JESP)* aims to publish articles that extend or create conceptual advances in social psychology. As the title of the journal indicates, we are focused on publishing primary reports of research in social psychology that use experimental or quasi-experimental.”

For a complete list of journals in social and personality psychology, please visit:  
<https://www.socialpsychology.org/journals.htm#social>

### **1.4.3. Online Social Psychology News**

If you are interested in keeping up with current research in the field of social psychology, visit SPSP's Character and Context blog by visiting <http://spsp.org/news-center/blog/2018-December-14-ICYMI> or take a look at Science Daily's Social Psychology News page at [https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/mind\\_brain/social\\_psychology/](https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/mind_brain/social_psychology/).

### **Module Recap**

Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes and when we apply a social lens, we examine how people interact with, or relate to, others. Social psychology differs from sociology in terms of its level of analysis – individual people and not the larger group – and is allied with personality psychology which examines how traits affect our social behavior. The history of social psychology is relatively short though many meaningful contributions have already been made. Still more are on the horizon as we branch out into cross-cultural and evolutionary psychology, forge a separate identity from social neuroscience, and engage in a deeper understanding of the effects of technology, and specifically the internet, on us. A snapshot of important professional societies and journals was offered as ways to communicate what individual researchers or teams are learning about social behavior with the broader scientific community and at times the general public.

This discussion will lead us into Module 2 where we discuss research methods used in social psychology. This will be the final module of Part I: Setting the Stage.

## Part I. Setting the Stage

# Module 2: Research Methods in Social Psychology

## **Module 2: Research Methods in Social Psychology**

### **Module Overview**

In Module 2 we will address the fact that psychology is the *scientific* study of behavior and mental processes. We will do this by examining the steps of the scientific method and describing the five major designs used in psychological research. We will also differentiate between reliability and validity and their importance for measurement. Psychology has very clear ethical standards and procedures for scientific research. We will discuss these but also why they are needed. Finally, psychology as a field, but especially social psychology as a subfield, is faced with a replication crisis and issues with the generalizability of its findings. These will be explained to close out the module.

### **Module Outline**

- 2.1. The Scientific Method
- 2.2. Research Designs Used by Social Psychologists
- 2.3. Reliability and Validity
- 2.4. Research Ethics
- 2.5. Issues in Social Psychology

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Clarify what it means for psychology to be scientific by examining the steps of the scientific method and the three cardinal features of science.
- Outline the five main research methods used in psychology and clarify how they are utilized in social psychology.
- Differentiate and explain the concepts of reliability and validity.
- Describe key features of research ethics.
- Clarify the nature of the replication crisis in psychology and the importance of generalizability.

## 2.1. The Scientific Method

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define scientific method.
- Outline and describe the steps of the scientific method, defining all key terms.
- Identify and clarify the importance of the three cardinal features of science.

In Module 1, we learned that psychology was the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. We will spend quite a lot of time on the behavior and mental processes part, but before we proceed, it is prudent to elaborate more on what makes psychology scientific. In fact, it is safe to say that most people not within our discipline or a sister science, would be surprised to learn that psychology utilizes the scientific method at all.

So what is the scientific method? Simply, the **scientific method** is a systematic method for gathering knowledge about the world around us. The key word here is that it is systematic meaning there is a set way to use it. What is that way? Well, depending on what source you look at it can include a varying number of steps. For our purposes, the following will be used:



Table 2.1: The Steps of the Scientific Method

Step	Name	Description
0	Ask questions and be willing to wonder.	To study the world around us you have to wonder about it. This inquisitive nature is the hallmark of <b>critical thinking</b> , or our ability to assess claims made by others and make objective judgments that are independent of emotion and anecdote and based on hard evidence, and required to be a scientist. We might wonder why our friend chose to go to a technical school or the military over the four year university we went to, which falls under attribution theory in social psychology.
1	Generate a research question or identify a problem to investigate.	Through our wonderment about the world around us and why events occur as they do, we begin to ask questions that require further investigation to arrive at an answer. This investigation usually starts with a <b>literature review</b> , or when we conduct a literature search through our university library or a search engine such as Google Scholar to see what questions have been investigated already and what answers have been found, so that we can identify <b>gaps</b> or holes in this body of work. For instance, in relation to attribution theory, we would execute a search using those words as our parameters. Google Scholar and similar search engines, would look for attribution-theory in the key words authors identify when writing their abstract. The search would likely return quite a few articles at which time you would pick and choose which ones to read from the <i>abstracts</i> (the short summary of what the article is about; it is sort of like the description of a book found on the back cover or sometimes the inside cover of a book jacket). As you read articles you would try and figure out what has and has not been done to give your future research project direction.
2	Attempt to explain the phenomena we wish to study.	We now attempt to formulate an explanation of why the event occurs as it does. This systematic explanation of a phenomenon is a <b>theory</b> and our specific, testable prediction is the <b>hypothesis</b> . We will know if our theory is correct because we have formulated a hypothesis which we can now test. In the case of our example, we are not really creating a theory as one exists to explain why people do what they did (attribution theory) but we can formulate a specific, testable prediction in relation to it. You might examine whether or not your friend made his choice because he is genuinely interested in learning a trade or serving his country, or if he was pushed to do this by his parents. The former would be a dispositional or personal reason while the latter would be

		situational. You might focus your investigation on the effect parents can have on the career choices children make. Maybe you suppose if a child is securely attached to his parents he will follow their wishes as compared to a child who is insecurely attached. This question would actually blend social and developmental psychology.
3	Test the hypothesis.	It goes without saying that if we cannot test our hypothesis, then we cannot show whether our prediction is correct or not. Our plan of action of how we will go about testing the hypothesis is called our <b>research design</b> . In the planning stage, we will select the appropriate research method to answer our question/test our hypothesis. In this case that is to what extent parenting and attachment serve as situational factors affecting career choice decisions. We will discuss specific designs in the next section but for now, we could use a survey and observation.
4	Interpret the results.	With our research study done, we now examine the data to see if the pattern we predicted exists. We need to see if a cause and effect statement can be made, assuming our method allows for this inference. The statistics we use take on two forms. First, there are <b>descriptive statistics</b> which provide a means of summarizing or describing data, and presenting the data in a usable form. You likely have heard of the mean or average, median, and mode. Along with standard deviation and variance, these are ways to describe our data. Second, there are <b>inferential statistics</b> which allow for the analysis of two or more sets of numerical data to determine the <b>statistical significance</b> of the results. Significance is an indication of how confident we are that our results are due to our manipulation or design and not chance. Typically we set this significance at no higher than 5% due to chance.
5	Draw conclusions carefully.	We need to accurately interpret our results and not overstate our findings. To do this, we need to be aware of our biases and avoid emotional reasoning so that they do not cloud our judgment. How so? In our effort to stop a child from engaging in self-injurious behavior that could cause substantial harm or even death, we might overstate the success of our treatment method. In the case of our attribution study, we might not fudge our results like this but still need to make sure we interpret our statistical findings correctly.

6	Communicate our findings to the larger scientific community.	Once we have decided on whether our hypothesis is correct or not, we need to share this information with others so that they might comment critically on our methodology, statistical analyses, and conclusions. Sharing also allows for <b>replication</b> or repeating the study to confirm its results. Communication is accomplished via scientific journals, conferences, or newsletters released by many of the organizations mentioned in Section 1.4. As a note, there is actually a major issue in the field of psychology related to replication right now. We will discuss this in Section 2.5.
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Science has at its root three *cardinal features* that we will see play out time and time again throughout this book, and as mentioned in Module 1. They are:

1. *Observation* – In order to know about the world around us we must be able to see it firsthand. In relation to social psychology, we know our friend and his parents pretty well, and so in our time with them have observed the influence they exert on his life.
2. *Experimentation* – To be able to make *causal* or cause and effect statements, we must be able to isolate variables. We have to manipulate one variable and see the effect of doing so on another variable. Experimentation is the primary method social psychology uses to test its hypotheses.
3. *Measurement* – How do we know whether or not our friend is truly securely attached to his parents? Well, simply we measure attachment. In order to do that, we could give our friend a short questionnaire asking about his attachment pattern to his parents. For this questionnaire, let's say we use a 5-point scale for all questions (with 1 meaning the question does not apply to 5 meaning it definitely is true or matters). If there were 10 questions, then our friend would have a score between 10 and 50. The 10 would come from him answering every question with a 1 and the 50 from answering every question

with a 5. If you are not aware, there are four main styles of attachment (secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized-disoriented). We would have 2-3 questions assessing each of the 4 styles meaning that if we had 2 questions for that style, the score would range from 2 to 10. If 3 questions, the range would be 3 to 15. The higher the score, the more likely the person exhibits that style to the parent and our friend should only have a high score on one of the four styles if our scale correctly assesses attachment. We will discuss reliability and validity in Section 2.3.

## **2.2. Research Designs Used by Social Psychologists**

### Section Learning Objectives

- List the five main research methods used in psychology.
- Describe observational research, listing its advantages and disadvantages.
- Describe case study research, listing its advantages and disadvantages.
- Describe survey research, listing its advantages and disadvantages.
- Describe correlational research, listing its advantages and disadvantages.
- Describe experimental research, listing its advantages and disadvantages.
- State the utility and need for multimethod research.

Step 3 called on the scientist to test their hypothesis. Psychology as a discipline uses five main research designs. These include observational research, case studies, surveys, correlational designs, and experiments.

### 2.2.1. Observational Research

In terms of **naturalistic observation**, the scientist studies human or animal behavior in its natural environment which could include the home, school, or a forest. The researcher counts, measures, and rates behavior in a systematic way and at times uses multiple judges to ensure accuracy in how the behavior is being measured. This is called *inter-rater reliability* as you will see in Section 2.3. The advantage of this method is that you witness behavior as it occurs and it is not tainted by the experimenter. The disadvantage is that it could take a long time for the behavior to occur and if the researcher is detected then this may influence the behavior of those being observed. In the case of the latter, the behavior of the observed becomes *artificial*.

**Laboratory observation** involves observing people or animals in a laboratory setting. The researcher might want to know more about parent-child interactions and so brings a mother and her child into the lab to engage in preplanned tasks such as playing with toys, eating a meal, or the mother leaving the room for a short period of time. The advantage of this method over the naturalistic method is that the experimenter can use sophisticated equipment and videotape the session to examine it at a later time. The problem is that since the subjects know the experimenter is watching them, their behavior could become artificial from the start.

**2.2.1.1. Example of an observational social psychology study.** Griffiths (1991) studied the gambling behavior of adolescents by observing the clientele of 33 arcades in the UK. He used participant (when the researcher becomes an active participant in the group they are studying) and non-participant observation methodologies and found that adolescent gambling depended on the time of day and the time of year, and regular players had stereotypical behaviors

and conformed to specific rules of etiquette. They played for fun, to win, to socialize, for excitement, and/or to escape.

### **2.2.2. Case Studies**

Psychology can also utilize a detailed description of one person or a small group based on careful observation. This was the approach the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, took to develop his theories. The advantage of this method is that you arrive at a rich description of the behavior being investigated but the disadvantage is that what you are learning may be unrepresentative of the larger population and so lacks **generalizability**. Again, bear in mind that you are studying one person or a very small group. Can you possibly make conclusions about all people from just one or even five or ten? The other issue is that the case study is subject to the bias of the researcher in terms of what is included in the final write up and what is left out. Despite these limitations, case studies can lead us to novel ideas about the cause of behavior and help us to study unusual conditions that occur too infrequently to study with large sample sizes and in a systematic way. Though our field does make use of the case study methodology, social psychology does not frequently use the design.

**2.2.2.1. Example of a case study from clinical psychology.** In 1895, the book, *Studies on Hysteria*, was published by Josef Breuer (1842-1925) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and marked the birth of psychoanalysis, though Freud did not use this actual term until a year later. The book published several case studies, including that of Anna O., born February 27, 1859 in Vienna to Jewish parents Siegmund and Recha Pappenheim, strict Orthodox adherents and considered millionaires at the time. Bertha, known in published case studies as Anna O., was expected to complete the formal education of a girl in the upper middle class which included foreign language, religion, horseback riding, needlepoint, and piano. She felt confined and

suffocated in this life and took to a fantasy world she called her “private theater.” Anna also developed hysteria to include symptoms such as memory loss, paralysis, disturbed eye movements, reduced speech, nausea, and mental deterioration. Her symptoms appeared as she cared for her dying father and her mother called on Breuer to diagnose her condition (note that Freud never actually treated her). Hypnosis was used at first and relieved her symptoms. Breuer made daily visits and allowed her to share stories from her private theater which he came to call “talking cure” or “chimney sweeping.” Many of the stories she shared were actually thoughts or events she found troubling and reliving them helped to relieve or eliminate the symptoms. Breuer’s wife, Mathilde, became jealous of her husband’s relationship with the young girl, leading Breuer to terminate treatment in the June of 1882 before Anna had fully recovered. She relapsed and was admitted to Bellevue Sanatorium on July 1, eventually being released in October of the same year. With time, Anna O. did recover from her hysteria and went on to become a prominent member of the Jewish Community, involving herself in social work, volunteering at soup kitchens, and becoming ‘House Mother’ at an orphanage for Jewish girls in 1895. Bertha (Anna O.) became involved in the German Feminist movement, and in 1904 founded the League of Jewish Women. She published many short stories; a play called *Women’s Rights*, in which she criticized the economic and sexual exploitation of women, and wrote a book in 1900 called *The Jewish Problem in Galicia*, in which she blamed the poverty of the Jews of Eastern Europe on their lack of education. In 1935 she was diagnosed with a tumor and was summoned by the Gestapo in 1936 to explain anti-Hitler statements she had allegedly made. She died shortly after this interrogation on May 28, 1936. Freud considered the talking cure of Anna O. to be the origin of psychoanalytic therapy and what would come to be called the cathartic method.

To learn more about observational and case study designs, please take a look at our Research Methods in Psychology textbook by visiting:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/observational-research/>

For more on Anna O., please see:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freuds-patients-serial/201201/bertha-pappenheim-1859-1936>

### 2.2.3. Surveys/Self-Report Data

A **survey** is a questionnaire consisting of at least one scale with some number of questions which assess a psychological construct of interest such as parenting style, depression, locus of control, attitudes, or sensation seeking behavior. It may be administered by paper and pencil or computer. Surveys allow for the collection of large amounts of data quickly but the actual survey could be tedious for the participant and **social desirability**, when a participant answers questions dishonestly so that he/she is seen in a more favorable light, could be an issue. For instance, if you are asking high school students about their sexual activity they may not give genuine answers for fear that their parents will find out. Or if you wanted to know about prejudicial attitudes of a group of people, you could use the survey method. You could alternatively gather this information via an interview in a structured or unstructured fashion. Important to survey research is that you have **random sampling** or when everyone in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. This helps the survey to be representative of the population and in terms of key demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, race, education level, and religious orientation.



To learn more about the survey research design, please take a look at our Research Methods in Psychology textbook by visiting:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/7-1-overview-of-survey-research/>

#### **2.2.4. Correlational Research**

This research method examines the relationship between two variables or two groups of variables. A numerical measure of the strength of this relationship is derived, called the *correlation coefficient*, and can range from -1.00, a perfect inverse relationship meaning that as one variable goes up the other goes down, to 0 or no relationship at all, to +1.00 or a perfect relationship in which as one variable goes up or down so does the other. In terms of a negative correlation we might say that as a parent becomes more rigid, controlling, and cold, the attachment of the child to the parent goes down. In contrast, as a parent becomes warmer, more loving, and provides structure, the child becomes more attached. The advantage of correlational research is that you can correlate anything. The disadvantage is that you can correlate anything. Variables that really do not have any relationship to one another could be viewed as related. Yes. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. For instance, we might correlate instances of making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with someone we are attracted to sitting near us at lunch. Are the two related? Not likely, unless you make a really good PB&J but then the person is probably only interested in you for food and not companionship. The main issue here is that correlation does not allow you to make a causal statement.

To learn more about the correlational research design, please take a look at our Research Methods in Psychology textbook by visiting:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/correlational-research/>

### **2.2.5. Example of a Study Using Survey and Correlational Designs**

Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, and Knafo (2002) examined the relationship of the big five personality traits and values by administering the Schwartz (1992) Values survey, NEO-PI, a positive affect scale, and a single item assessing religiosity to introductory to psychology students at an Israeli university. For Extraversion, it was found that values that define activity, challenge, excitement, and pleasure as desirable goals in life (i.e. stimulation, hedonism, and achievement) were important while valuing self-denial or self-abnegation, expressed in traditional values, was antithetical.

For Openness, values that emphasize intellectual and emotional autonomy, acceptance and cultivation of diversity, and pursuit of novelty and change (i.e. universalism, self-direction, and stimulation) were important while conformity, security, and tradition values were incompatible. Benevolence, tradition, and to a lesser degree conformity, were important for Agreeableness while power and achievement correlated negatively. In terms of Conscientiousness (C), there was a positive correlation with security values as both share the goal of maintaining smooth interpersonal relations and avoiding disruption of social order and there was a negative correlation with stimulation, indicating an avoidance of risk as a motivator of C.

Finally, there was little association of values with the domain of Neuroticism but a closer inspection of the pattern of correlations with the facets of N suggests two components. First, the

angry hostility and impulsiveness facets could be called extrapunitive since the negative emotion is directed outward and tends to correlate positively with hedonism and stimulation values and negatively with benevolence, tradition, conformity, and C values. Second, the anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, and vulnerability facets could be called intrapunitive since the negative emotion is directed inward. This component tends to correlate positively with tradition values and negatively with achievement and stimulation values.

### 2.2.6. Experiments

An **experiment** is a controlled test of a hypothesis in which a researcher manipulates one variable and measures its effect on another variable. The variable that is manipulated is called the **independent variable (IV)** and the one that is measured is called the **dependent variable (DV)**. A common feature of experiments is to have a **control group** that does not receive the treatment or is not manipulated and an **experimental group** that does receive the treatment or manipulation. If the experiment includes **random assignment** participants have an equal chance of being placed in the control or experimental group. The control group allows the researcher to make a *comparison* to the experimental group, making a causal statement possible, and stronger.

**2.2.6.1. Example of an experiment.** Allison and Messick (1990) led subjects to believe they were the first of six group members to take points from a common resource pool and that they could take as many points as desired which could later be exchanged for cash. Three variables were experimentally manipulated. First, subjects in the low payoff condition were led to believe the pool was only 18 or 21 points in size whereas those in the high payoff condition were told the pool consisted of either 24 or 27 points. Second, the pools were divisible (18 and 24) or nondivisible (21 or 27). Third, half of the subjects were placed in the fate control

condition and told that if the requests from the six group members exceeded the pool size, then no one could keep any points, while the other half were in the no fate control condition and told there would be no penalties for overconsumption of the pool. Finally, data for a fourth variable, social values, was collected via questionnaire four weeks prior to participation. In all, the study employed a 2 (fate control) x 2 (payoff size) x 2 (divisibility) x 2 (social values) between-subjects factorial design.

Results showed that subjects took the least number of points from the resource pool when the resource was divisible, the payoffs were low, and there was no fate control. On the other hand, subjects took the most points when the resource was nondivisible, the payoffs were high, and subjects were noncooperative. To further demonstrate this point, Allison and Messick (1990) counted the number of inducements to which participants were exposed. This number ranged from 0 to 4 inducements. Subjects took between one-fifth and one-fourth when there were one or two inducements, took about one-third when there were three inducements, and about half of the pool when all four were present. They state that an equal division rule was used when there were no temptations to violate equality but as the number of temptations increased, subjects became progressively more likely to overconsume the pool. The authors conclude that the presence of competing cues/factors tends to invite the use of self-serving rules to include "First-come, first-served" and "People who get to go first take more."

To learn more about the experimental research design, please take a look at our [Research Methods in Psychology](#) textbook by visiting:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/experiment-basics/>

### 2.2.7. Multi-Method Research

As you have seen above, no single method alone is perfect. All have their strengths and limitations. As such, for the psychologist to provide the clearest picture of what is affecting behavior or mental processes, several of these approaches are typically employed at different stages of the research process. This is called **multi-method research**.

### 2.2.8. Archival Research

Another technique used by psychologists is called **archival research** or when the researcher analyzes data that has already been collected and for another purpose. For instance, a researcher may request data from high schools about a student's GPA and their SAT and/or ACT score(s) and then obtain their four-year GPA from the university they attended. This can be used to make a prediction about success in college and which measure – GPA or standardized test score – is the better predictor.

### 2.2.9. Meta-Analysis

**Meta-analysis** is a statistical procedure that allows a researcher to combine data from more than one study. For example, Shariff et al. (2015) published an article on religious priming and prosociality in *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. The authors used effect-size analyses, *p*-curve analyses, and adjustments for publication bias (no worries, you don't have to understand any of that), to evaluate the robustness of four types of religious priming, how religion affects prosocial behavior, and whether religious-priming effects generalize to those who are loosely or not religious at all. Results were presented across 93 studies and 11,653

participants and showed that religious priming has robust effects in relation to a variety of outcome measures, prosocial behavior included. It did not affect non-religious people though.

#### **2.2.10. Communicating Results**

In scientific research, it is common practice to communicate the findings of our investigation. By reporting what we found in our study other researchers can critique our methodology and address our limitations. Publishing allows psychology to grow its knowledge base about human behavior. We can also see where gaps still exist. We move it into the *public domain* so others can read and comment on it. Scientists can also replicate what we did and possibly extend our work if it is published.

There are several ways to communicate our findings. We can do so at conferences in the form of posters or oral presentations, through newsletters from APA itself or one of its many divisions or other organizations, or through research journals and specifically scientific research articles. Published journal articles represent a form of communication between scientists and in them, the researchers describe how their work relates to previous research, how it replicates and/or extends this work, and what their work might mean theoretically.

Research articles begin with an **abstract** or a 150-250 word summary of the entire article. The purpose is to describe the experiment and allows the reader to make a decision about whether he or she wants to read it further. The abstract provides a statement of purpose, overview of the methods, main results, and a brief statement of the conclusion. Keywords are also given that allow for students and other researchers alike to find the article when doing a search.

The abstract is followed by four major sections as described:

- **Introduction** – The first section is designed to provide a summary of the current literature as it relates to your topic. It helps the reader to see how you arrived at your hypothesis and the design of your study. Essentially, it gives the logic behind the decisions you made. You also state the purpose and share your predictions or hypothesis.
- **Method** – Since replication is a required element of science, we must have a way to share information on our design and sample with readers. This is the essence of the method section and covers three major aspects of your study – your participants, materials or apparatus, and procedure. The reader needs to know who was in your study so that limitations related to generalizability of your findings can be identified and investigated in the future. You will also state your operational definition, describe any groups you used, random sampling or assignment procedures, information about how a scale was scored, etc. Think of the Method section as a cookbook. The participants are your ingredients, the materials or apparatus are whatever tools you will need, and the procedure is the instructions for how to bake the cake.
- **Results** – In this section you state the outcome of your experiment and whether they were statistically significant or not. You can also present tables and figures.
- **Discussion** – In this section you start by restating the main findings and hypothesis of the study. Next, you offer an interpretation of the findings and what their significance might be. Finally, you state strengths and limitations of the study which will allow you to propose future directions.

Whether you are writing a research paper for a class or preparing an article for publication, or reading a research article, the structure and function of a research article is the same. Understanding this will help you when reading social psychological articles.

## 2.3. Reliability and Validity

### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify why reliability and validity are important.
- Define reliability and list and describe forms it takes.
- Define validity and list and describe forms it takes.

Recall that measurement involves the assignment of scores to an individual which are used to represent aspects of the individual such as how conscientious they are or their level of depression. Whether or not the scores actually represent the individual is what is in question. Cuttler (2017) says in her book Research Methods in Psychology, “Psychologists do not simply *assume* that their measures work. Instead, they collect data to *demonstrate* that they work. If their research does not demonstrate that a measure works, they stop using it.” So how do they demonstrate that a measure works? This is where reliability and validity come in.

### 2.3.1. Reliability

First, **reliability** describes how consistent a measure is. It can be measured in terms of **test-retest reliability**, or how reliable the measure is across time, **internal consistency**, or the “consistency of people’s responses across the items on multiple-item measures,” (Cuttler, 2017), and finally **inter-rater reliability**, or how consistent different observers are when making



judgments. In terms of inter-rater reliability, Cuttler (2017) writes, “Inter-rater reliability would also have been measured in Bandura’s Bobo doll study. In this case, the observers’ ratings of how many acts of aggression a particular child committed while playing with the Bobo doll should have been highly positively correlated.”

### 2.3.2. Validity

A measure is considered to be **valid** if its scores represent the variable it is said to measure. For instance, if a scale says it measures depression, and it does, then we can say it is valid. Validity can take many forms. First, **face validity** is “the extent to which a measurement method appears “on its face” to measure the construct of interest” (Cuttler, 2017). A scale purported to measure values should have questions about values such as benevolence, conformity, and self-direction, and not questions about depression or attitudes toward toilet paper.

**Content validity** is to what degree a measure covers the construct of interest. Cuttler (2017) says, “... consider that attitudes are usually defined as involving thoughts, feelings, and actions toward something. By this conceptual definition, a person has a positive attitude toward exercise to the extent that he or she thinks positive thoughts about exercising, feels good about exercising, and actually exercises.”

Oftentimes, we expect a person’s scores on one measure to be correlated with scores on another measure that we expect it to be related to, called **criterion validity**. For instance, consider parenting style and attachment. We would expect that if a person indicates on one scale that their father was authoritarian (or dictatorial) then attachment would be low or insecure. In

contrast, if the mother was authoritative (or democratic) we would expect the child to show a secure attachment style.

As researchers we expect that our results will generalize from our sample to the larger population. This was the issue with case studies as the sample is too small to make conclusions about everyone. If our results do generalize from the circumstances under which our study was conducted to similar situations, then we can say our study has **external validity**. External validity is also affected by how real the research is. Two types of realism are possible. First, **mundane realism** occurs when the research setting closely resembles the real world setting. **Experimental realism** is the degree to which the experimental procedures that are used feel real to the participant. It does not matter if they really mirror real life but that they only appear real to the participant. If so, his or her behavior will be more natural and less artificial.

In contrast, a study is said to have good **internal validity** when we can confidently say that the effect on the dependent variable (the one that is measured) was due solely to our manipulation or the independent variable. A **confound** occurs when a factor other than the independent variable leads to changes in the dependent variable.

To learn more about reliability and validity, please visit:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/reliability-and-validity-of-measurement/>

## 2.4. Research Ethics

### Section Learning Objectives

- Exemplify instances of ethical misconduct in research.
- List and describe principles of research ethics.

Throughout this module so far, we have seen that it is important for researchers to understand the methods they are using. Equally important, they must understand and appreciate ethical standards in research. The American Psychological Association identifies high standards of ethics and conduct as one of its four main guiding principles or missions. To read about the other three, please visit <https://www.apa.org/about/index.aspx>. So why are ethical standards needed and what do they look like?

### 2.4.1. Milgram's Study on Learning...or Not

Possibly, the one social psychologist students know about the most is Stanley Milgram, if not by name, then by his study on obedience using shock (Milgram, 1974). Essentially, two individuals came to each experimental session but only one of these two individuals was a participant. The other was what is called a **confederate** and is part of the study without the participant knowing. The confederate was asked to pick heads or tails and then a coin was flipped. As you might expect, the confederate always won and chose to be the *learner*. The “experimenter,” who was also a confederate, took him into one room where he was hooked up to wires and electrodes. This was done while the “teacher,” the actual participant, watched and added to the realism of what was being done. The teacher was then taken into an adjacent room

where he was seated in front of a shock generator. The teacher was told it was his task to read a series of word pairs to the learner. Upon completion of reading the list, he would ask the learner one of the two words and it was the learner's task to state what the other word in the pair was. If the learner incorrectly paired any of the words, he would be shocked. The shock generator started at 30 volts and increased in 15-volt increments up to 450 volts. The switches were labeled with terms such as "Slight shock," "Moderate shock," "Danger: Severe Shock," and the final two switches were ominously labeled "XXX."

As the experiment progressed, the teacher would hear the learner scream, holler, plead to be released, complain about a heart condition, or say nothing at all. When the learner stopped replying, the teacher would turn to the experimenter and ask what to do, to which the experimenter indicated for him to treat nonresponses as incorrect and shock the learner. Most participants asked the experimenter whether they should continue at various points in the experiment. The experimenter issued a series of commands to include, "Please continue," "It is absolutely essential that you continue," and "You have no other choice, you must go on."

Any guesses as to what happened? What percent of the participants would you hypothesize actually shocked the learner to death? Milgram found that 65 percent of participants/teachers shocked the learner to the XXX switches which would have killed him. Why? They were told to do so. How do you think the participant felt when they realized that they could kill someone simply because they were told to do so?

Source: Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

#### **2.4.2. GO TO JAIL: Go Directly to Jail. Do Not Pass Go. Do Not Collect \$200**

Early in the morning on Sunday, August 14, 1971, a Palo Alto, CA police car began arresting college students for committing armed robbery and burglary. Each suspect was arrested at his home, charged, read his Miranda rights, searched, handcuffed, and placed in the back of the police car as neighbors watched. At the station, the suspect was booked, read his rights again, and identified. He was then placed in a cell. How were these individuals chosen? Of course, they did not really commit the crimes they were charged with. The suspects had answered a newspaper ad requesting volunteers for a study of the psychological effects of prison life.

After screening individuals who applied to partake in the study, a final group of 24 were selected. These individuals did not have any psychological problems, criminal record, history of drug use, or mental disorder. They were paid \$15 for their participation. The participants were divided into two groups through a flip of a coin. One half became the prison guards and the other half the prisoners. The prison was constructed by boarding up each end of a corridor in the basement of Stanford University's Psychology building. This space was called "The Yard" and was the only place where the prisoners were permitted to walk, exercise, and eat. Prison cells were created by removing doors from some of the labs and replacing them with specially made doors with steel bars and cell numbers. A small closet was used for solitary confinement and was called "The Hole." There were no clocks or windows in the prison and an intercom was used to make announcements to all prisoners. The suspects who were arrested were transported to "Stanford County Jail" to be processed. It was there they were greeted by the warden and told what the seriousness of their crime was. They were stripped searched and deloused, and the process was made to be intentionally degrading and humiliating. They were given uniforms with a prison ID number on it. This number became the only way they were referred to during their

time. A heavy chain was placed on each prisoner's right ankle which served the purpose of reminding them of how oppressive their environment was.

The guards were given no training and could do what they felt was necessary to maintain order and command the respect of the prisoners. They made their own set of rules and were supervised by the warden, who was played by another student at Stanford. Guards were dressed in identical uniforms, carried a whistle, held a billy club, and wore special mirror sun-glasses so no one could see their eyes or read their emotions. Three guards were assigned to each of the three hour shifts and supervised the nine prisoners. At 2:30 am they would wake the prisoners to take counts. This provided an opportunity to exert control and to get a feel for their role. Similarly, prisoners had to figure out how they were to act and at first, tried to maintain their independence. As you might expect, this led to confrontations between the prisoners and the guards resulting in the guards physically punishing the prisoners with push-ups.

The first day was relatively quiet, but on the second day, a rebellion broke out in which prisoners removed their caps, ripped off their numbers, and put their beds against their cell doors creating a barricade. The guards responded by obtaining a fire extinguisher and shooting a stream of the cold carbon dioxide solution at the prisoners. The cells were then broken into, the prisoners stripped, beds removed, ringleaders put into solitary confinement, and a program of harassment and intimidation of the remaining inmates began. Since 9 guards could not be on duty at all times to maintain order, a special "privilege cell" was established and the three prisoners least involved in the rebellion were allowed to stay in it. They were given their beds and uniforms back, could brush their teeth and take a bath, and were allowed to eat special food in the presence of the other six prisoners. This broke the solidarity among the prisoners.

Less than 36 hours after the study began a prisoner began showing signs of uncontrollable crying, acute emotional disturbance, rage, and disorganized thinking. Though his emotional problems were initially seen as an attempt to gain release which resulted in his being returned to the prison and used as an informant, the symptoms worsened and he had to be released from the study. Then there was the rumor of a mass escape by the prisoners which the guards worked to foil. When it was revealed that the prisoners were never actually going to attempt the prison break, the guards became very frustrated and made the prisoners engage in menial work, pushups, jumping jacks, and anything else humiliating that they could think of.

A Catholic priest was invited to evaluate how realistic the prison was. Each prisoner was interviewed individually and most introduced himself to the priest by his prison number and not his name. He offered to help them obtain a lawyer and some accepted. One prisoner was feeling ill (#819) and did not meet with the priest right away. When he did, he broke down and began to cry. He was quickly taken to another room and all prison garments taken off. While this occurred, the guards lined up the other prisoners and broke them out into a chant of “Prisoner #819 is a bad prisoner. Because of what Prisoner #819 did, my cell is a mess. Mr. Correctional Officer.” This further upset the prisoner and he was encouraged to leave, though he refused each time. He finally did agree to leave after the researcher (i.e. Zimbardo) told him what he was undergoing was just a research study and not really prison. The next day parole hearings were held and prisoners who felt they deserved to be paroled were interviewed one at a time. Most, when asked if they would give up the money they were making for their participation so they could leave, said yes.

In all, the study lasted just six days. Zimbardo noted that three types of guards emerged—tough but fair who followed the prison rules; “good guys” who never punished the prisoners and

did them little favors; and finally those who were hostile, inventive in their employment of punishment, and who truly enjoyed the power they had. As for the prisoners, they coped with the events in the prison in different ways. Some fought back, others broke down emotionally, one developed a rash over his entire body, and some tried to be good prisoners and do all that the guards asked of them. No matter what strategy they used early on, by the end of the study they all were disintegrated as a group, and as individuals. The guards commanded blind obedience from all of the prisoners.

When asked later why he ended the study, Zimbardo cited two reasons. First, it became apparent that the guards were escalating their abuse of the prisoners in the middle of the night when they thought no one was watching. Second, Christina Maslach, a recent Stanford Ph.D. was asked to conduct interviews with the guards and prisoners and saw the prisoners being marched to the toilet with bags on their heads and legs chained together. She was outraged and questioned the study's morality.

*Source: <http://www.prisonexp.org/>*

If you would like to learn more about the moral foundations of ethical research, please visit: <https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/moral-foundations-of-ethical-research/>

### **2.4.3. Ethical Guidelines**

Due to these studies, and others, the American Psychological Association (APA) established guiding principles for conducting psychological research. The principles can be broken down in terms of when they should occur during the process of a person participating in the study.



**2.4.3.1. Before participating.** First, researchers must obtain **informed consent** or when the person agrees to participate because they are told what will happen to them. They are given information about any *risks* they face, or potential harm that could come to them, whether physical or psychological. They are also told about *confidentiality* or the person's right not to be identified. Since most research is conducted with students taking introductory psychology courses, they have to be given the right to do something other than a research study to likely earn required credits for the class. This is called an **alternative activity** and could take the form of reading and summarizing a research article. The amount of time taken to do this should not exceed the amount of time the student would be expected to participate in a study.

**2.4.3.2. While participating.** Participants are afforded the *ability to withdraw* or the person's right to exit the study if any discomfort is experienced.

**2.4.3.3. After participating.** Once their participation is over, participants should be **debriefed** or when the true purpose of the study is revealed and they are told where to go if they need assistance and how to reach the researcher if they have questions. So can researchers **deceive** participants, or intentionally withhold the true purpose of the study from them? According to the APA, a minimal amount of deception is allowed.

Human research must be approved by an **Institutional Review Board** or IRB. It is the IRB that will determine whether the researcher is providing enough information for the participant to give consent that is truly informed, if debriefing is adequate, and if any deception is allowed or not.

If you would like to learn more about how to use ethics in your research, please read:

<https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/putting-ethics-into-practice/>

## **2.5. Issues in Social Psychology**

### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Describe the replication crisis in psychology.
- Describe the issue with generalizability faced by social psychologists.

### **2.5.1. The Replication Crisis in Social Psychology**

Today, the field of psychology faces what is called a replication crisis. Simply, published findings in psychology are not replicable, one of the hallmarks of science. Swiatkowski and Dompnier (2017) addressed this issue but with a focus on social psychology. They note that the field faces a confidence crisis due to events such as Diederick Staple intentionally fabricating data over a dozen years which lead to the retraction of over 50 published papers. They cite a study by John et al. (2012) in which 56% of 2,155 respondents admitted to collecting more data after discovering that the initial statistical test was not significant and 46% selectively reported studies that “worked” in a paper to be published. They also note that Nuijten et al. (2015) collected a sample of over 30,000 articles from the top 8 psychology journals and found that 1 in 8 possibly had an inconsistent  $p$  value that could have affected the conclusion the researchers drew.

So, how extensive is the issue? The Psychology Reproducibility Project was started to determine to what degree psychological effects from the literature could be replicated. One hundred published studies were attempted to be replicated by independent research teams and from different subfields in psychology. Only 39% of the findings were considered to be successfully replicated. For social psychology the results were worse. Only 25% were replicated.

Why might a study not replicate? Swiatkowski and Dompnier (2017) cite a few reasons. First, they believe that statistical power, or making the decision to not reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$  - hypothesis stating that there is no effect or your hypothesis was not correct) when it is actually false, is an issue in social psychology. Many studies are underpowered as shown by small effect sizes observed in the field, which inflates the rate of false-positive findings and leads to unreplicable findings.

Second, they say that some researchers use “unjustifiable flexibility in data analysis, such as working with several undisclosed dependent variables, collecting more observations after initial hypothesis testing, stopping data collection earlier than planned because of a statistically significant predicted finding, controlling for gender effects a posteriori, dropping experimental conditions, and so on” (pg. 114). Some also do undisclosed multiple testing without making adjustments, called *p-hacking*, or dropping observations to achieve a significance level, called *cherry picking*. Such practices could explain the high prevalence of false positives in social psychological research.

Third, some current publication standards may promote bad research practices in a few ways. Statistical significance has been set at  $p = 0.05$  as the *sine qua non* condition for publication. According to Swiatkowski and Dompnier (2017) this leads to dichotomous thinking in terms of the “strict existence and non-existence of an effect” (pg. 115). Also, positive, statistically significant results are more likely to be published than negative, statistically, non-significant results which can be hard to interpret. This bias leads to a structural incentive to seek out positive results. Finally, the authors point out that current editorial standards show a preference for novelty or accepting studies which report new and original psychological effects. This reduces the importance of replications which lack prestige and inspire little interest among

researchers. It should also be pointed out that there is a mentality of ‘Publish or perish’ at universities for full time faculty. Those who are prolific and publish often are rewarded with promotions, pay raises, tenure, or prestigious professorships. Also, studies that present highly novel and cool findings are showcased by the media.

The authors state, “In the long run, the lack of a viable falsification procedure seriously undermines the quality of scientific knowledge psychology produces. Without a way to build a cumulative net of well-tested theories and to abandon those that are false, social psychology risks ending up with a confused mixture of both instead”(pg. 117).

For more on this issue, check out the following articles

- 2016 Article in the Atlantic - <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/03/psychologys-replication-crisis-cant-be-wished-away/472272/>
- 2018 Article in The Atlantic - <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/11/psychologys-replication-crisis-real/576223/>
- 2018 Article in the Washington Post - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2018/08/27/researchers-replicate-just-13-of-21-social-science-experiments-published-in-top-journals/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.2a05aff2d7de](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2018/08/27/researchers-replicate-just-13-of-21-social-science-experiments-published-in-top-journals/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2a05aff2d7de)
- 2018 Article from Science News - <https://www.sciencenews.org/blog/science-public/replication-crisis-psychology-science-studies-statistics>

### **2.5.2. Generalizability**

Earlier we discussed how researchers want to generalize their findings from the sample to the population, or from a small, representative group to everyone. The problem that plagues social psychology is who makes up our samples. Many social psychological studies are

conducted with college students working for course credit (Sears, 1986). They represent what is called a **convenience sample**. Can we generalize from college students to the larger group?

## **Module Recap**

In Module 1 we stated that psychology studied behavior and mental processes using the strict standards of science. In Module 2 we showed you how that is done via adoption of the scientific method and use of the research designs of observation, case study, surveys, correlation, and experiments. To make sure our measurement of a variable is sound, we need to have measures that are reliable and valid. And to give our research legitimacy we have to use clear ethical standards for research to include gaining informed consent from participants, telling them of the risks, giving them the right to withdraw, debriefing them, and using nothing more than minimal deception. Despite all this, psychology faces a crisis in which many studies are not replicating and findings from some social psychological research are not generalizable to the population.

This concludes Part I of the book. In Part II we will discuss how we think about ourselves and others. First, we will tackle the self and then move to the perception of others. Part II will conclude with a discussion of attitudes.

## Part II. How We Think About Ourselves and Others

## Part II. How We Think About Ourselves and Others

### Module 3: The Self

## **Module 3: The Self**

### **Module Overview**

Human beings, by their very nature, are prone to focus on the self and to engage in behavior to protect it. Module 3 will cover some of the ways this occurs. We will start by focusing on the self-concept or who we are and self-schemas. We will also discuss self-perception theory, possible selves, the self-reference effect, self-discrepancies, how others affect our sense of self, and cultural differences of the self. Then we will tackle the issue of self-esteem and its two forms – global and domain specific. Self-esteem across the life span and gender and cross-cultural differences will be examined. We will discuss how self-esteem is affected, and protected, when mortality is made salient, self-efficacy and locus of control, self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-enhancement. Our third section will cover self-presentation and specific strategies we use such as self-promotion, ingratiation, false modesty, self-verification, and self-monitoring. Finally, we will discuss cognitive biases and heuristics used to defend the self, such as the self-serving bias, false consensus effect, false uniqueness effect, and unrealistic optimism and defensive pessimism.

### **Module Outline**

- 3.1. The Self-Concept
- 3.2. Self-Esteem
- 3.3. Self-Presentation
- 3.4. Cognitive Biases and Heuristics Used to Bolster the Self



**Module Learning Outcomes**

- Define the self-concept and clarify how we learn about the self.
- Define self-esteem and describe efforts we engage in to protect or improve it.
- Describe ways we make ourselves appear in a more positive light to others.
- Outline cognitive biases and heuristics used to defend the self.

**3.1. The Self-Concept****Section Learning Objectives**

- Define self-concept and clarify whether it is stable or malleable.
- Define and exemplify self-schemas.
- Describe self-perception theory and how it helps us learn about the self.
- Clarify the importance of possible selves.
- Describe the self-reference effect.
- Define self-discrepancy theory.
- Describe Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self.
- Define reflected appraisal.
- Describe the social comparison theory and how it helps us to learn about the self.
- Clarify the importance of the two-factor-theory of emotion for the self.
- Describe cultural differences in the conception of the self.

**3.1.1. The Age-Old Question – Who Are You?**

Quite possibly the fundamental question of human existence is who we are. If asked who you are by another person, how would you describe yourself? Are you smart, resourceful,

compassionate, petty, empathetic, self-serving, or optimistic? Are you good at sports or do you write poetry well? Should any singing you do be reserved for the shower? These descriptors are what make up our **self-concept** or the way we see ourselves. This view is probably clear most of the time. If you are not talented at writing, you will likely avoid writing intensive classes as a student. Some classes you cannot avoid, and so in these instances you will seek out extra help so that you are successful with the class. If you are incredibly talented at football, you may go out for the team but will not likely try out for the baseball team. But are there times when you are not so sure about who you are? The answer is likely yes. Maybe you and your spouse are considering adopting. Though you consider yourself a compassionate person, you are not sure you can open your heart up to another child the same way you would to a biological child. In this case, you have no prior experience to reference to determine who you are in this situation.

**3.1.1.1. Is self-concept stable or malleable?** There are two contradictory views of the self. Though our self-concept is relatively stable and people resist any information that contradicts their view of themselves (Greenwald, 1980), specific social environments can cause different selves to appear (Martindale, 1980). Markus and Kunda (1986) explored this dual nature of the self-concept in a study of 40 female students at the University of Michigan who participated to earn credit in their introductory psychology class (recall our discussion in Module 2 of convenience samples and issues with generalizability as a result). The participants were run one at a time and with three female confederates who were also undergraduate students but paid for their involvement. The researchers used minimal deception and led the participants to believe the study was on attitudes and opinions. They were first shown posters in a series of three trials. The posters had three items on them, either three colors, cartoons, or greeting cards, and the participant was asked to record for each poster the number of the item she liked best (of the

three). The experimenter then explained that she had to transfer the responses to a computer coding sheet and that it would make life easier if all participants (the actual participant and the three confederates) could read their responses out loud. On each trial the participant went first, followed by the confederates. Her responses determined what the confederates would say. In the uniqueness condition, on all but 3 of the 18 trials the confederates all disagreed with the participant but agreed with one another. So if the participant preferred Color A the confederates all chose C. On the other three trials, the first confederate agreed with the participant while the other two disagreed with her and with each other. In the similarity condition, on all but 3 of the trials, the confederates agreed with the participant. If she chose Color C, then so did the three confederates. On the other three trials, none of the confederates agreed with the participant and two agreed with each other (meaning if the participant chose C, one chose A and two chose B, for instance). The participant then completed a series of dependent measures to include judgments of similarity to reference groups, self-categorization judgments, and word association. There was also a manipulation check such that participants were asked what percentage of the time they thought other participants agreed with their preference judgment in the first part of the study. Debriefing then occurred.

Results showed that for the manipulation check, subjects were aware of the extent to which participants agreed with them. The uniqueness group stated that the others agreed with them just 8% of the time while the similarity subjects estimated 77% of the time. The authors note that there was actually 17% and 83% agreement, respectively. In terms of how stable self-concept is, results showed that neither group appeared to have been influenced by the information about their similarity or uniqueness. In terms of the malleability of self-concept, the differences in the latencies between the two conditions for self-categorization judgments (i.e.

their reaction times), suggests that different types of self-conceptions were mediating these judgments. This was also seen in the similarity to reference groups task such that both conditions felt more similar to in-groups than out-groups. It should be noted that the effect was not as strong for the similarity condition as their mean judgment of similarity to the in-group ( $M = 4.93$ ) was not as strong as the uniqueness condition ( $M = 5.13$ ), and their judgment of out-groups was higher ( $M = 2.26$ ) than the uniqueness condition ( $M = 1.82$ ).

Markus and Kunda (1986) conclude that both the stability and malleability of the self-concept were demonstrated in their study, though if one only looked at the results of the first part of the study (the showing of the posters with the three items to choose from) “one would tend to infer that the self-conceptions of these individuals were relatively unresponsive to the self-relevant information provided by the study” (pg. 864). Further examination of the word association, latency, and similarity tasks show that “...underlying these similar general self-descriptions were very different temporary self-conceptions” (pg. 864). When individuals were led to feel unique, they became disturbed by this and following the preference manipulation viewed their uniqueness as negative while the state of similarity to others became positive and desirable. They recruited conceptions of themselves as similar to others and made these endorsements relatively quickly (as shown through shorter latencies). Those made to feel extremely similar to others responded in the exact opposite way.

Finally, they say that the self-concept is a set of self-conceptions and from it, “the individual constructs a working self-concept that integrates the core self-conceptions with those elicited by the immediate context. In this sense, the self-concept becomes similar to that suggested by the symbolic interactionists. Thus, for Mead (1934) there was no fixed self-

concept, only the current self-concept that was negotiated from the available set of self-conceptions” (Markus and Kunda, 1986, pg. 865).

### 3.1.2. Self-Schemas

As we interact with our world, we gather information that we need to organize in a way that we can obtain it again when needed. Basically, we store it away in memory and retrieve it when we encounter the person, object, or concept at a later time. This element of cognition is called a **schema** and as we can have schemas concerning external objects or ideas, we too can have them about ourselves, called a **self-schema**. These self-schemas make up our self-concept in much the same way that the words on this page make up the module you are reading, and this module is just one of many in the textbook. Markus (1977) defined self-schemata as, “cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information contained in an individual's social experiences (pg. 64).”

Self-schemas represent a person’s domain specific attributes or abilities and experiences as they relate to that domain. This allows for quicker encoding, more confident evaluation, accurate retrieval of domain-relevant information, and the ability to adapt to different information processing goals (Carpenter, 1988; Greenwald, 1980; Markus, 1977). Individuals with a self-schema in a domain are said to be *schematic* while those lacking one are *aschematic* for that ability (Cross & Markus, 1994). According to Markus (1977), aschematic individuals are not able to recognize their ability in a given domain and do not assign their ability any critical personal importance.

They can also help to shape social perception when the description of person is ambiguous. One study showed that when a target (Chris) is described as equally likely to be independent or dependent, participants classified as independence-schematics rated Chris as more independent and dependence-schematics rated him as more dependent or less likely to act independently compared to aschematics. The authors say that self-schemas serve a motivational role such that they help to foster the self-system's stability, validation, and perpetuation (Green & Sedikides, 2001).

**3.1.2.1. Types of self-schemas.** Prieto, Cole, and Tageson (1992) compared depressed, clinic-referred children; nondepressed, clinic-referred children; and nondepressed, non-clinic referred children on three cognitive measures of positive and negative self-schemas. On a word recognition measure and an incidental word recall measure, depressed individuals had a less positive self-schema compared to the other two groups. Only non-depressed groups recalled significantly more positive words than negative ones. The results suggest that such negative self-schemas affect how new information is stored and accessed. Another study found that depressive self-schemas were a result of peer victimization such that individuals who experienced relational and verbal victimization more so than physical victimization by their peers had stronger negative and weaker positive self-cognitions and an elimination of the “normative memorial bias for recall of positive self-referential words” (Cole et al., 2014).

Self-schemas have also been identified for race-ethnicity (Oyserman, 2008; Oyserman et al., 2003), body weight (Altabe & Thompson, 1996; Markus, Hamill, & Sentis, 1987), gender (Markus, Crane, Bernstein, & Siladi, 1982), exercise (Kendzierski, 1990), religion (McIntosh, 1995), and illness (Clemmey & Nicassio, 1997), to name a few. Lodge and Hamill (1986) even propose a partisan schema related to political knowledge and interest. Those described as

schematics are high in interest and knowledge and show a “consistency bias” such that they recall more policy statements consistent with a congressman’s party affiliation than those inconsistent with it. They also can classify campaign statements as Republican or Democrat. Aschematics, or those low in interest and knowledge, perform at no better than chance levels in the same task. The authors note that the restructuring of memory shown by schematics, and in particular those scoring especially high on interest and knowledge which they call sophisticates, demonstrates a serious bias in how political information is processed.

**3.1.2.2. Self-perception theory.** One way we gain knowledge about ourselves is through observing ourselves, called **introspection** or looking inward. We notice food preferences, particular music genres we like, the types of clothing we prefer to wear, and the type of person we consider to be a friend. But what we gain self-knowledge about tends to be things that are not central or critical (Bem, 1972). Why is that? The things about us that are most important make up the attitudes we express, the beliefs we hold, the traits we display, and the emotions we prefer to display and so are at our core. **Self-perception** helps us to learn about the more secondary aspects of the self.

**3.1.2.3. Possible selves.** Not only are we concerned about the person we are right now, but we focus on the person we might become, which Markus and Nurius (1986) call **possible selves**. These could be positive conceptions of our future self, but likewise, they could be something we are afraid of becoming and could elicit guilt and anxiety in the individual (Carver et al., 1999). According to Inglehart, Markus, and Brown (1988) our possible selves allow us to focus attention on specific, task-relevant cognitions, emotions and actions, thereby allowing us to move from our current state to the desired one (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a), especially when a possible self is seen as a self-regulator (i.e. a student who spends more time on homework,

improved grades, and participated in class more because they realize they are not doing well now, but could in the future if they engage in specific types of behaviors; Oyserman et al., 2004). Across two studies, Cross and Markus (1994) showed that schematic individuals were better able to direct their attention to the problem at hand and concentrate on it while aschematic individuals were quicker to endorse negative possible selves related to logical reasoning ability. Hence, self-schemas can help foster competence by “providing a foundation for the development of possible selves related to that ability” (pg. 434). They continue, “...the possible self may link effective steps and strategies for solving reasoning problems with beliefs about one’s ability and competence in the domain. Bringing to mind a positive, desired view of oneself in the future as logical and analytical may also help the student dispel anxiety or worry during the task” (pg. 435). Research has also shown that when balance between feared and expected possible selves does not exist, the outcomes can be negative such as the initiation and maintenance of delinquent activity in adolescents (Oyserman and Markus, 1990b).

**3.1.2.4. The self-reference effect.** Would it surprise you to learn that humans have a tendency to more efficiently process, and recall more accurately, information about ourselves? Probably not. This is called the **self-reference effect** (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Craik and Lockhart (1972) proposed the depth of processing (DOP) framework which says that how well a memory trace is retained is determined by the nature of the encoding operations such that deep, meaningful analyses result in a more durable trace than shallow, structural analyses of a stimulus. Up to 1977 it was believed that better retention could be achieved by semantic encoding though Rogers, Kuiper, and Kriker (1977) showed that self-referent encoding produced even better recall. The self-reference effect has since been replicated in numerous studies (for an overview of this research, please see Symons & Johnson, 1997).



Since the self-reference effect is a property of memory, we might expect that it is affected by the aging process. Across three studies, Gutchess, et al., (2007) showed that under some circumstances, older adults can benefit from self-referencing as much as young adults can but in general, they are more limited in their application of it. The authors speculate that “older adults may be limited in their application of self-referencing due to its demand on cognitive resources and their diminished ability to apply the strategy flexibly and broadly in other types of evaluative judgments” (pg. 834).

In terms of what area of the brain might control the self-reference effect, research using lesioning has found a role for the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC). Patients with focal brain damage to the mPFC were given a standard trait judgment paradigm and damage to this area was found to abolish the self-reference effect, suggesting that the structure is important for self-referential processing and the neural representation of the self (Philippi et al., 2012). The implications of this research go beyond social psychology, too. The authors write, “The ability to detect and encode information for self-relevance might contribute not only to the formation of a self-concept, but also more broadly to psychological and social functioning. Across a variety of psychopathological conditions and personality disorders, self-referential processing appears to be dysfunctional, making it a major target for psychotherapy.” To read this article yourself, please visit: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3297026/>.

### **3.1.3. Self-Discrepancies**

Self-discrepancy theory was postulated by Higgins (1987) to distinguish between the various self-states proposed by sociology, psychology, and even philosophy. Higgins says there are two cognitive dimensions which underlie the various self-state representations. The first is

the **domains of the self**, numbering three total – the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The *actual* self includes the attributes that you are believed to possess, whether by yourself or another person. The *ideal self* includes all attributes that someone, whether you or another person, hope or wishes for you to possess. The *ought self* are the attributes that someone (yourself or another person) believes you should possess (i.e. linked to a sense of duty, obligation, or responsibility). Higgins exemplifies the ideal and ought self through the example of the conflict a hero faces between their personal wishes and their sense of duty.

The second cognitive dimension is what he calls **standpoints on the self**, or whose perspective on the self is involved. The two basic standpoints are your own personal standpoint and the standpoint from a significant other such as a spouse, parent, sibling, or close friend. A person can have a self-state representation for any number of these significant others.

The two cognitive dimensions can then be combined to form six basic types of self-state representations: actual/own, actual/other, ideal/own, ideal/other, ought/own, and ought/other. Our self-concept is derived from the first two, while the last four are self-directive standards or acquired guides for being, or as he calls them, *self-guides*. Self-discrepancy theory therefore proposes that people differ as to which self-guide they are motivated to meet, and that people do not necessarily possess all four (we might have only ought or ideal self-guides). We are motivated to “reach a condition where our self-concept matches our personally relevant self-guides” (pg. 321).

If this does not happen, we can experience sadness, disappointment, fear, dissatisfaction, apprehension, or feel threatened. For instance, if a discrepancy exists between the actual/own and ideal/own states, meaning the person feels their personal hopes or wishes have not been fulfilled, they will be vulnerable to dejected-related emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and

dissatisfaction. If the discrepancy is between actual/own and ideal/other, meaning they have failed to obtain a significant other's hopes or wishes for them, they may feel shame, embarrassment, or feel downcast. If the discrepancy is between actual/own and ought/other, meaning the current state of our attributes from our standpoint does not match the state the person believes some significant other considers to be our duty or obligation to obtain, then we might experience agitation-related emotions and feel fear or threatened. Finally, an actual/own and ought/own discrepancy occurs when the current state of our attributes, from our standpoint, do not match the state we believe is our duty or obligation to obtain and so we feel self-contempt, guilt, and uneasiness (Higgins, 1987).

In sum, **self-discrepancy theory** helps us to understand discrepancies between our view of our self and who we would ideally like to be or believe other people think we should be.

### 3.1.4. How Others Affect Our Sense of Self

**3.1.4.1. The looking-glass self.** Sociologist Charles Cooley (1902) stated that people based their sense of self on how they think others see them. This social interaction serves as a sort of mirror in which people use the judgments of others to measure their own worth, behavior, and values. He calls this the **looking-glass self**, and it occurs in three steps. First, we imagine how we appear to others when in a social situation. Second, we imagine what others think of our appearance. Third, we form opinions and feelings about this perceived judgment and then respond to it. Let's say for instance you are assigned to a small group in your social psychology class and are asked to discuss the topic of self-discrepancy theory. You have not interacted with these individuals thus far this semester, and so you want to demonstrate to these fellow students that you are knowledgeable of the concept. As you discuss the material, you take note of how

your fellow classmates respond to your thoughts and applications of the concept of self-discrepancy theory. What is their body language? Do they maintain eye contact with you? Do they seem to be distracted or are they focused? What words do they use in response to your comments? If your classmates generally have positive feedback such as commenting constructively on your thoughts or listening intently, you will feel confident that they see you as competent and knowledgeable. If, on the other hand, they look away often, are playing a game on their phone, or have negative comments, you will likely feel that they do not see you as knowledgeable. To make matters more complicated, in the future your professor has you work with a different group of classmates for a different activity. The new task provides a different context for the interaction and the new set of students changes the nature of those involved. So, how you use the information obtained from this new group of individuals will likely be different than the first group. And of course, not all feedback carries the same weight. Maybe you know one of your group members is an A student and doing very well in the class. If they provide positive feedback this will mean more to you than a student praising your analysis who you know is struggling.

**3.1.4.2. Reflected appraisals.** Building off Cooley's work, Felson (1985) said that we come to see ourselves as those important to us see us, called a **reflected appraisal**. In an interesting study of adolescents from the Netherlands, Verkuyten (1988) found that the general self-esteem of ethnic minorities was relatively high, despite the fact that they have low status, experience discrimination and prejudice, and have little power to influence policymakers. So why was their self-esteem higher than expected? As support for the reflected appraisal process, they derived their self-esteem from fellow family members who regarded them highly.

**3.1.4.3. Social comparison theory.** Oftentimes, we are uncertain of our abilities and so look to others for a clue. A college baseball player may compare his batting average against those of his teammates to see how well he is doing. Festinger (1954) called this the **social comparison theory**. We make such comparisons as a way to bring about self-improvement or to motivate us to be better. If the players' batting average is not the lowest, but close, he may ask for additional batting practice or tips from the batting coach. We also compare ourselves to others to enhance our positive self-image. If the player learns that his batting average is better than most of his teammates, he will feel good about his hitting ability. Of course, he might also develop a superior attitude or become biased or judgmental.

How might social media affect the social comparisons we make? Social networking sites such as Facebook give the impression that others are doing better than they are which can be detrimental to how we view ourselves. In a study of 231 adults aged 18-25, Facebook use was found to lead to greater levels of negative social comparison which resulted in seeing oneself as less socially competent and less physically attractive. This effect was weaker among happier individuals (de Vries & Kuhne, 2015). A similar study of Instagram "likes" found that exposing female undergraduates to thin-ideal images led to greater levels of body and facial dissatisfaction than average images and that greater investment in Instagram likes led to higher levels of appearance comparison and facial dissatisfaction (Tiggerman et al., 2018).

The benefit of social comparison is that it can lead to efforts to self-improve. How so? We could make a specific type of social comparison called an **upward social comparison** in which we compare our traits and abilities against someone who is more skilled than we are. This can lead us to engage in motivated behavior to improve, but it could also leave us feeling incompetent, shameful, or jealous (Collins, 1996).

**3.1.4.4. Arousal as information about us.** Stimuli are forever present in our sensory world and we have perceptions of them. These perceptions lead us to respond. For example, if you are walking down a street and hear footsteps behind you, you might perceive this as a threat if it is late at night and you thought you were alone on the street. This could lead you to walk quicker to your car or house or turnaround to confront the person behind you. What if you heard footsteps but is the middle of the day, on campus, and in between classes? You would likely perceive this as just another student going to class and have no reaction. Schachter (1964) proposed his **two-factor theory of emotion** which states that how we perceive our own emotions depends on two factors: 1) how much physiological arousal we experience such as rapid breathing, sweating, and/or a pounding heart, and 2) the cognitive interpretation or label we apply such as angry, scared, or happy. Others help us with the second factor such that we will examine their reactions to a given situation to help us interpret the arousal we are experiencing. Say for instance we are at a movie and out of nowhere the killer jumps out and attacks the protagonist. When this happens, we jump in our seat and scream, and notice that other moviegoers have the same reaction. We thus realize we experienced a high level of arousal and label the emotion as scared. Soon after we likely laugh at ourselves since we knew all along the event was not real but a mere fiction on the screen.

### **3.1.5. The Self and Culture**

The self does not exist on an island but in the context of the society and culture in which it lives. As such, there is a great deal of variability in terms of what the self-concept is from culture to culture. First, **culture** includes all the beliefs, customs, institutions, experience, values, attitudes, art, religion, etc. of a group of people. Each culture establishes **norms**, or rules, for

how its members should behave. For instance, Western cultures view the self as **independent** or **individualistic**, meaning that individuals reject conformity, focus on individual traits and goals, and seek personal achievement while Asian cultures are **interdependent** or **collectivistic** and identify the self in a social context, believe in blending in, focus on group goals, promote solidarity, and are against egotism. According to Markus and Kitayma (1991) the independent construal of self is bounded, unitary, and stable; focuses on being unique, realizing internal attributes, and promoting ones' goals; and sees the role of others as self-appraisal and linked to social comparison and reflected appraisal. In terms of the interdependent self, they say the structure is flexible; the task is to belong and fit in, occupy one's place and promote other's goals; and our relationships with others in specific contexts define the self. The independent is internal and private, focused on one's abilities, thoughts, and feelings while the interdependent is external and public, and focused on statuses, roles, and relationships (Markus & Kitayma, 1991).

Research shows that East Asians, namely those from Korea, have more flexibility in their self-concept compared to Americans (Choi & Choi, 2002) and that Asian Americans, compared to European Americans, show variability across relationship contexts but stability within them (English & Serena, 2007). In another study, when trait self-perceptions *across* different relationships were inconsistent, relationship quality and authenticity was lower for European Americans but not East Asian Americans. When there was inconsistency *within* the same relationship, both ethnic groups showed negative outcomes (English & Chen, 2011).

## 3.2. Self-Esteem

### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe how self-esteem is a need.
- Identify and define types of self-esteem.
- Clarify what happens to self-esteem across the life span.
- Clarify if there are gender and cross-cultural differences in self-esteem.
- Define Terror Management Theory and clarify its relevance to self-esteem.
- Describe self-efficacy and locus of control and how they relate to the self.
- Define self-regulation.
- Define self-awareness and describe issues related to it.
- Differentiate public and private self-consciousness.
- Define self-enhancement and describe strategies used in it.

### 3.2.1. Self-Esteem Defined and Described

**3.2.1.1. Self-esteem as a need.** Psychologist Abraham Maslow described a hierarchy of needs as one way to understand motivation and specifically the push of motivated behavior (contrasted with the pull that comes from outside us). According to Maslow, there are five types of needs arranged in a hierarchy, or more so in a pyramid formation. Lower level needs must be fulfilled before higher level ones can be. At the bottom are the *physiological needs* which are what we need to survive. They include food, water, sex, temperature, oxygen, etc. At the next level are needs centered on our *safety and security*, or living in a safe environment, being safe from Mother Nature, and having enough money to pay the bills. With this level satisfied, we can next focus on feeling socially connected to others and being in mature relationships, which he



called the *love and belonging needs*. Fourth are our *self-esteem needs* or being independent, gaining mastery, how we feel about ourselves, and being responsible. At the pinnacle of the pyramid are our *self-actualization needs*, which Carl Rogers and other humanistic psychologists discussed. This level focuses on realizing our full potential, feeling fulfilled and satisfied, and seeking personal growth. We also pursue interests out of intrinsic interest and not extrinsic demands. For our purposes, Maslow's fourth level will be focused on and **self-esteem** can be defined as how we see ourselves, including both positive and negative evaluative components.

**3.2.1.2. Types of self-esteem.** Is self-esteem a unitary concept though? Rosenberg (1979) proposed a global self-esteem and subsequent research has supported domain specific self-esteem such as for academic matters (Rosenberg et al., 1995). So, which causes which? Does global self-esteem lead to specific or vice versa? The authors propose that global could be the result of specific self-esteem since it is "based on the judgments of various parts of the self, the parts (specifics) might be seen as responsible for the whole (global)" (pg. 148). In terms of the specific arising from global, they say, "assessments of particular facets of the self may well be based on one's overall feelings of self-worth" (pg. 148). They conclude that global and specific self-esteem are in fact neither equivalent nor interchangeable, global appears to be heavily affective in nature and associated with psychological well-being while specific is more judgmental and evaluative arising from a cognitive component; specific facets of the self vary in their level of abstraction and some types such as academic self-esteem affect global self-esteem more than other types; the degree to which we value our behavior affects how much specific self-esteem affects global; and finally, in the case of school performance it is affected by self-esteem but in terms of the specific type and not global (Rosenberg et al., 1995).

What are some of the *specific* types of self-esteem.? According to Gentile et al. (2009)

they might include:

- Physical appearance – what we look like
- Athletics – how good we are in sports
- Academics – our general performance in school
- Social Acceptance – our friendships, peer relationships, and social approval
- Family – Our family can serve as a source support and help affirm our beliefs about our own self-worth
- Behavioral conduct – includes our perception of how socially unacceptable our behavior is
- Affect – Feeling happy, satisfied, and free from anxiety which lead to better emotional well-being
- Personal self – Our evaluation of our personality independent from the physical body or others
- Self-satisfaction – Our measure of happiness with oneself as a person
- Moral-ethical self-concept – Our perception of moral-ethical attributes and how satisfied we are with our religion or lack of one

**3.2.1.3. Self-esteem across the life span.** Our next question centers on whether self-esteem can change throughout our life. Trzesniewski et al., (2003) tested this very question across two studies and found that, “stability is relatively low during early childhood, increases through adolescence and young adulthood, and then declines during midlife and old age” (pg. 215). This effect held across gender, nationality, and ethnicity. How can we account for these trends? First,

self-esteem was least stable during childhood, though the authors question whether self-esteem measures are valid for young children as they may not fully understand the meaning of questions on such scales or cannot form abstract concepts of themselves, such as being good or bad. Second, self-esteem is lower in early adolescence and increases after this likely due to the turmoil puberty brings about in terms of rapid maturational changes. By late adolescence and early adulthood, the individual has the resources and autonomy necessary to deal with these changes. Finally, self-esteem stability decreases from midlife to old age likely because in midlife there are few environmental changes but as we transition into late adulthood, there are a great deal of life changes and shifting social circumstances such as children moving out, retirement, health problems and the death of loved ones. In regard to late adulthood, they add, "Another possibility is that as individuals age they may begin to review their lifelong accomplishments and experiences, leading in some cases to more critical self-appraisals and in other cases to greater acceptance of their faults and limitations" (pg. 216).

Interestingly, data from 187 newlywed couples shows that the birth of the first child does affect self-esteem over the first five years of marriage. Changes mostly affect the mother and are negative in nature with a sudden decline in self-esteem the first year after the child's birth and a gradual decline continuing over the next four years. The study utilized a control group of parents who had no child during the same period and for which there was no change in self-esteem. This suggests that the change in self-esteem of the parents with a child was likely due to the birth of their first child (Bleidorn et al., 2016).

**3.2.1.4. Gender and cross-cultural differences in self-esteem.** Gentile et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 115 studies and assessed the 10 different domains of self-esteem mentioned at the end of the previous section. They found that gender differences vary greatly

across the different domains of self-esteem. In some cases, there was no difference at all (i.e. academic, social acceptance, family, and affect), while other domains showed a moderate amount of variation (i.e. males higher on physical appearance, athletics, personal, and self-satisfaction; females higher on behavioral conduct and moral-ethical).

But are there cross-cultural differences in gender and self-esteem? Bleidorn et al. (2016) tackled the issue in an Internet sample of 985,937 individuals from 48 nations and found that self-esteem increased from late adolescence to middle adulthood, there were significant gender gaps, and that males consistently report higher self-esteem than females. These findings are important as they show that the trends, which are consistent with the literature but previous studies only examined Western samples, are in fact cross-culturally valid and suggest universal mechanisms at least in part. These mechanisms might include biological sources including genetics or hormones or universal sociocultural factors such as socially learned gender roles and stereotypes.

Despite these cross-cultural similarities, there was a difference across nations in terms of the magnitude of gender-specific trajectories, suggesting that universal explanations may not be at work but culture-specific influences such as a nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, mean age at marriage, and HDI (Human Development Index; measures of living a long life, being educated, and having a decent standard of living) are responsible. Their data suggests that wealthy, developed, egalitarian, and individualistic nations had relatively large gender differences in self-esteem, though they decrease throughout early and middle adulthood. In contrast, collectivistic, poorer, developing nations marked by greater gender inequality and an earlier age at marriage show smaller gender gaps, though these increase during early and middle adulthood.

Bleidorn et. al. (2016) conclude that universal influences on self-esteem do not tell the whole story, and that “systematic cultural differences in the magnitude and shape of gender and age differences in self-esteem provide evidence for contextual influences on the self-esteem development in men and women” (pg. 408).

### 3.2.2. Terror Management Theory (TMT)

**3.2.2.1. What is TMT?** Ernest Becker (1962, 1973, & 1975) stated that it is the human capacity for intelligence, to be able to make decisions, think creatively, and infer cause and effect, that leads us to an awareness that we will someday die. This awareness manifests itself as terror and any cultural worldviews that are created need to provide ways to deal with this terror, create concepts and structures to understand our world, answer cosmological questions, and give us a sense of meaning in the world.

Based on this notion, **Terror Management Theory** (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1986) posits that worldviews serve as a buffer against the anxiety we experience from knowing we will die someday. This cultural anxiety buffer has two main parts. First, we must have faith in our worldviews and be willing to defend them. Second, we derive self-esteem from living up to these worldviews and behaving in culturally approved ways. So, culture supports a belief in a just world and meeting the standards of value of the culture provides us with immortality in one of two ways. *Literal immortality* is arrived at via religious concepts such as the soul and the afterlife. *Symbolic immortality* is provided by linking our identity to something higher such as the nation or corporation and by leaving something behind such as children or cultural valued products. It has also been linked to the appeal of fame (Greenberg, Kosloff, Solomon, Cohen, and Landau, 2010).

Finally, based on whether death thoughts are in focal attention or are unconscious, we employ either proximal or distal defenses. *Proximal defenses* involve the suppression of death-related thoughts, a denial of one's vulnerability, or participating in behavior that will reduce the threat of demise (i.e. exercise) and occur when thought of death is in focal attention. On the other hand, *distal defenses* are called upon when death thoughts are unconscious and involve strivings for self-esteem and faith in one's worldview and assuage these unconscious mortality concerns through the symbolic protection a sense of meaning offers.

**3.2.2.2. The typical mortality salience study.** In a typical mortality salience (MS) study, participants are told they are to take part in an investigation of the relationship between personality traits and interpersonal judgments. They complete a few standardized personality assessments which are actually filler items to sustain the cover story. Embedded in the personality assessments is a projective personality test which consists of two open ended questions which vary based on which condition the participant is in. Participants in the MS condition are asked to write about what they think will happen to them when they die and the emotions that the thought of their own death arouses in them. Individuals in the control condition are asked to write about concerns such as eating a meal, watching television, experiencing dental pain, or taking an exam. Next, they complete a self-report measure of affect, typically the PANAS (Positive-Affect, Negative-Affect Scale), to determine the effect of MS manipulation on their mood. Finally, they are asked to make judgments about individuals who either directly or indirectly threaten or bolster their cultural worldviews.

**3.2.2.3. Worldview defense.** General findings on TMT have shown that when mortality is made salient, we generally display unfavorable attitudes toward those who threaten our worldview and celebrate those who uphold our view. This effect has been demonstrated in

relation to anxious individuals even when part of one's in-group (Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, Kosloff, and Weise, 2010) such that mortality reminders led participants to react more negatively toward an anxious police liaison from their community (Study 1) or to a fellow university student who was anxious (Study 2). Mortality salience has also been found to elevate preference for political candidates who are charismatic and espouse the same values associated with the participant's political worldview, whether conservative or liberal (Kosloff, Greenberg, Weise, and Solomon, 2010).

Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, and Lyon (1989) examined reactions of participants to those who violated or upheld cultural worldviews across a series of six experiments. In general, they hypothesized that when people are reminded of their own mortality, they are motivated to maintain their cultural anxiety buffer and are punitive toward those who violate it and benevolent to those who uphold it. Experiments 1 and 3 provided support for the hypothesis that subjects induced to think about their own mortality increased their desire to punish the moral transgressor (i.e. to recommend higher bonds for an accused prostitute) while rewarding the hero (Experiment 3). Experiment 2 replicated the findings of Experiment 1 and extended them by showing that increasing MS does not lead subjects to derogate just any target as it had no effect on evaluations of the experimenter. Also, MS increased punishment of the transgressor only among subjects who believed the target's behavior was truly immoral.

Experiments 4 - 6 tested alternative explanations for the findings. First, self-awareness could lead individuals to behave in a manner consistent with their attitudes and standards. The results of Study 4 showed that unlike MS, self-awareness does not encourage harsher bond recommendations and in fact, heightened self-awareness reduces how harshly a prostitute is

treated among individuals with positive attitudes toward prostitution. In Study 5, physiological arousal was monitored and MS was found not to arise from mere heightened arousal. Finally, Experiment 6 showed that particular features of the open-ended death questionnaire did not lead to the findings of Studies 1-5, but rather to requiring subjects to think about their own deaths.

McGregor, Lieberman, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, Simon, and Pyszczynski (1998) tested the hypothesis that MS increases aggression against those who threaten one's worldview by measuring the amount of hot sauce allocated to the author of a derogatory essay. In the study, politically conservative and liberal participants were asked to think about their own death (MS) or their next important exam (control). They were then asked to read an essay that was derogatory toward either conservatives or liberals. Finally, participants allocated a quantity of very spicy hot sauce to the author of the essay, knowing that the author did not like spicy foods and would have to consume the entire sample of hot sauce. As expected, MS participants allocated significantly more hot sauce to the author of the worldview-threatening essay than did control participants.

In a second study, participants thought about their own mortality or dental pain and were given an opportunity to aggress against someone who threatened their worldview. Half of the MS participants allocated the hot sauce before evaluating the target while the other half evaluated the target before allocating the hot sauce. Results of Study 2 showed that MS participants allocated significantly more hot sauce when they were not able to verbally derogate the targets prior to the administration of hot sauce. However, when MS participants were able to first express their attitudes toward the target, the amount of hot sauce allocated was not significantly greater than for the controls. This finding suggests that people will choose the first mode of worldview defense provided to them.



**3.2.2.4. Self-esteem.** According to the anxiety buffer hypothesis, if a psychological structure provides protection against anxiety, then strengthening that structure should make an individual less prone to displays of anxiety or anxiety related behavior in response to threats while weakening that structure should make a person more prone to exhibit anxiety or anxiety related behavior in response to threats. In support of this, Greenberg et al. (1992) showed that by increasing self-esteem, self-reported anxiety in response to death images and physiological arousal in response to the threat of pain could be reduced. Furthermore, the authors found no evidence that this effect was mediated by positive affect. Additional support for the function of self-esteem in reducing anxiety was provided by Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, and McGregor (1997) who showed that individuals with high self-esteem, whether induced experimentally (Experiment 1) or dispositionally (Experiment 2), did not respond to MS with increased worldview defense and that this occurred due to the suppression of death constructs (Experiment 3).

### **3.2.3. Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control**

**Self-Efficacy** (Bandura, 1986) is our sense of competence and feeling like we can deal with life's problems. It includes our beliefs about our ability to complete a task and affects how we think, feel, and motivate ourselves. When our self-efficacy is high, we feel like we can cope with life events and overcome obstacles. Difficult tasks are seen as challenges and we set challenging goals. In contrast, if it is low, we feel hopeless, helpless, and that we cannot handle what life throws at us. We avoid difficult tasks and throw in the towel quickly when things get tough. These individuals are easily depressed and stressed.

Our sense of competence is affected by the degree to which we blame internal or external forces for our success and failures. Using Julian Rotter's (1973) concept of **locus of control**, we have an *internal* locus of control if we believe we are in control of our own destiny, but if we believe outside forces determine our life, we have an *external* locus of control.

So how do self-efficacy and locus of control intersect with one another. A study of students from a mid-sized public university in the northeastern area of the United States showed that students with an external locus of control and who are low in academic self-efficacy should be identified as they enter college and interventions directed at them to help them perform better in their classes (Drago, Rheinheimer, & Detweiler, 2018). A study of 147 women with type 1 diabetes examined the relationship between self-efficacy, locus of control, and what their expectations were of preconception counseling (Grady & Geller, 2016). Using the Diabetes-Specific Locus of Control (DLC) measure which assesses beliefs about internal, chance, and powerful others loci of control in terms of how diabetes is managed (the measure has 5 subscales: internal-autonomy, internal-blame, chance, powerful other – health professionals, and powerful other – nonmedical), a measure to assess preconception planning, and sociodemographic data, the researchers tested the hypothesis that expectations of preconception counseling would be associated with beliefs about disease control and self-efficacy. The results showed that self-efficacy for planning a healthy pregnancy predicted outcome expectations of preconception counseling. The authors write, "...women's self-efficacy was positively associated with their perceived usefulness of preconception counseling and birth control use, whereas self-blame about disease management negatively correlated with these views" (pg. 41). The authors suggest that efforts should be taken to improve self-efficacy and empower women with diabetes to confidently control their disease" (Grady & Geller, 2016).

### 3.2.4. Self-Regulation

We cannot always act or say what we feel. At times, we have to practice what social psychologists call **self-regulation** or controlling and directing our thoughts, feelings, and actions so that we can achieve a societal or personal goal. The good news is that much of our self-regulation occurs outside of conscious awareness but if we are trying to engage in meaningful behavioral change, we might have to focus much of our energy into self-control. One study linked successful self-regulation to executive functions to include updating, inhibiting, and shifting, which results in the ability to take goal-direction action such as losing weight (Dohle, Diel, & Hofmann, 2018).

Do concerted efforts at self-regulation reduce the amount of energy available for such activities in subsequent tasks? The question implies that self-regulation is a limited resource. Baumeister, Bratslasky, Muraven, and Tice (1998) tested this over four experiments and described this temporary reduction in the self's ability to engage in volitional action caused by engaging in a volitional act previously *ego depletion*. The researchers first attempted to show that exerting self-control in terms of resisting temptation (Experiment 1) or a preliminary act of choice and responsibility (Experiment 2) would reduce the person's ability to self-regulate on a subsequent, frustrating and difficult task. Results showed that people asked to resist eating chocolates and to make themselves eat radishes instead gave up much faster when next asked to complete a difficult puzzle than those who could indulge and eat the chocolate. Likewise, people who freely and deliberately consented to make a counterattitudinal **or** proattitudinal speech gave up quickly when asked to do the puzzle while those who expected to make the counterattitudinal speech under low-choice conditions showed no reduction in self-control. They state that it was the act of responsible choice, and not the behavior itself, that depleted the self

and reduced persistence on the subsequent task. Experiments 3 and 4 further confirmed the finding that an initial act of volition leads to ego depletion in subsequent tasks. The good news is that this resource is replenished with time and specific factors could hasten or delay this replenishment (Baumeister et al., 1998).

### **3.2.5. Self-Awareness**

Duval and Wicklund (1972) proposed that our self-regulation can either be directed inward and toward the self or directed outward and toward the environment. We are usually focused outward, but there are times when our attention is turned inward. For instance, if you walk by a mirror you might stop to see how you look in your new jeans. If we see a video of ourselves, are asked to talk about ourselves in an interview, or are required to give a presentation in our social psychology class, we experience an increased level of self-awareness and compare ourselves against a high standard which leads to reduced self-esteem since we realize we do not meet the standard. We then engage in motivated behavior to meet the standard, reassess whether we have, and then continue making adjustments until we finally meet the standard or give up and turn away from the self (Carver & Scheier, 1981). As you might expect, the process is aversive and so we want to resolve it (Flory et al., 2000). If we do not, we could experience depression (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987), engage in binge eating (Heatherton & Baumeister), and engage in counternormative behavior such as cheating (Diener & Wallbom, 1976) to name a few of the negative effects. Two recent studies found that when male participants were exposed to an intervention designed to focus their attention onto inhibitory, self-awareness cues, they engaged in significantly less alcohol-related physical aggression behaviors toward a female confederate

compared to controls (Gallagher & Parrott, 2016) but for men with an internal and not an external locus of control (Purvis, Gallagher, & Parrott, 2016).

It is possible that some individuals are more self-focused than others, a distinction referred to as public vs. private self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). **Public self-consciousness** refers to an individual who focuses on themselves as a social object and is concerned by how they appear to others. In contrast, **private self-consciousness** refers to an individual who focuses on the internal self, is introspective, and attends to one's thoughts, feelings, and motives. Scheier, Buss, and Buss (1978) found that for those high in private self-consciousness, the correlation between aggressive behavior and self-report of aggressiveness was significantly higher than for those low in private self-consciousness or high or low public self-consciousness. Public self-consciousness has also been found to relate to social aspects of identity while private self-consciousness was related to personal aspects (Cheek & Briggs, 1982).

### 3.2.6. Self-Enhancement

**Self-enhancement** is a fundamental component of human nature and involves our tendency to see ourselves in a positive light. This often occurs after our self-esteem has been negatively affected in some way (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998).

According to Sedikides & Gregg (2008), self-enhancement can be done in one of several ways. First, we might self-advance or self-protect either by augmenting positivity or reducing the negativity of the self-concept. Second, self-enhancement can occur either publicly or privately whereby in the case of the former we engage in favorable self-presentation and the latter is an internal affair. Third, we tend to self-enhance in domains that matter most to us. Finally, self-enhancement is either candid or tactical, meaning “one can both seize an opportunity for overt

and immediate self-advancement, or one can forgo it in favor of other activities liable to facilitate delayed self-enhancement” (pg. 104).

People can also engage in **positive illusions** (Taylor & Brown, 1988) in which they hold opinions of themselves that are exaggerated or falsely positive regarding abilities and skills. These positive illusions include inflating their perceptions of themselves (i.e. self-aggrandizement), believing they have more control over events than they do (i.e. exaggerated perceptions of control), and being overly optimistic about their future (i.e. unrealistic optimism). Positive illusions have been shown to lead to successful adjustment to stressful events (Taylor & Armor, 1996); increased satisfaction in close relationships when an individual idealized their partner and is in turn idealized by them (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2011; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996); and better outcomes for physical health later in life in terms of more satisfaction with leisure time, higher self-esteem, better perceived health, and less boredom proneness when retirees hold an exaggerated youthful bias (Gana, Alaphillippe, & Bailly, 2002). Positive illusions have been reported in parenting as well in which parents have a tendency to rate their own children as possessing more positive and less negative attributes than other children (Wenger & Fowers, 2008).

Have you ever worried about doing well on a test and so create an excuse to cover poor performance such as saying you were sick when you took it? If so, you engaged in **behavioral self-handicapping** (Jones & Berglas, 1978). We self-handicap when we are uncertain about our abilities and anticipate a threat to our self-esteem. Instead of saying we failed the exam because our ability was low or we did not study, we instead blame it on being sick or not sleeping well the night before. Self-handicapping can take two forms – behavioral and claimed. *Behavioral*

self-handicapping occurs when we actively acquire an impediment such as drug or alcohol abuse (Arkin & Baumgardner, 1985) or do not have enough time to practice (Baumeister, Hamilton, & Tice, 1985). *Claimed* self-handicapping occurs when a person only reports obstacles to their success such as suffering from test anxiety (Smith, Snyder, and Handelsman, 1982) or being in a bad mood (Baumgardner, Lake, and Arkin, 1985). Between the two, behavioral handicaps are more convincingly tied to performance and so more credible, while claimed handicaps serve as an excuse for failure but do not necessarily decrease the person's chance of success (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). Finally, Stewart & Walker (2014) found that self-handicapping was predicted by perfectionism and an external locus of control in a study of 79 university students (they also found that perfectionism predicted low self-efficacy).

We might even engage in the social comparison process to feel better about ourselves. How so? Instead of comparing our performance to others to see where we rate, we will look for someone we know performs worse than we do or is worse off than we are, and then make a **downward social comparison** (Wills, 1981). This makes us feel better about ourselves because no matter how bad off we are at the time, that person is in a far worse predicament. Maybe we know we are in a batting slump over the past 10 games and have experienced a reduction in our self-esteem as a result. We might compare ourselves against another teammate who has underperformed all year and realize that our situation is temporary and not seemingly permanent like theirs.

People have a tendency to evaluate themselves much higher than they evaluate others. For instance, they are smarter, better looking, more capable, and more honest than other people. This is called the “**better than average**” (BTA) effect. Across five studies, Brown (2012)

showed that the BTA is stronger for important attributes than ones that do not matter and when participants experienced a threat to their feelings of self-worth. It has also been shown that the effect holds for easy tasks which produce underconfidence, but not for difficult ones which lead to overconfidence and making a worse-than-average bias (Larrick, Burson, & Soll, 2007).

Finally, Kanten and Teigen (2008) asked 385 students to rate themselves or an acquaintance relative to their peers on several personality traits. The results showed that participants saw themselves as superior to most others at all points in time. The authors describe a better than average *improvement* effect such that participants said they were more superior now compared to the past and expected to be even more superior in the future.

Finally, Cialdini et al. (1976) said that people have a tendency to publicly announce their associations with successful others in a process they called “**bask in reflected glory**” (BIRG). In a series of three field experiments involving 300 university students across seven universities in the United States, Cialdini et al. (1976) found that participants strived to bask in the glory of successful others even though they were not the cause of their success, such as wearing school apparel and saying ‘we’ after their team was victorious but not when they lost (in the case of a loss, participants often said ‘they lost’ instead of ‘we lost’). In another study, two days before the 1999 general election in Flanders researchers counted and recorded houses displaying at least one poster or one removable lawn sign supporting a political party (a total of 462 addresses for posters and 177 addresses for lawn signs). The day after the elections, the houses were checked to see if the poster or lawn sign (s) was/were still present. The results showed that the better the election result, the more houses that still displayed the sign/poster. Winners flaunted their association with the winning party, supporting BIRG while supporters of the losing party tried to conceal their association (Boen et al., 2002).



### 3.3. Self-Presentation

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Define self-presentation.
- Define self-promotion and describe how it is used in self-presentation.
- Define ingratiation and describe how it is used in self-presentation.
- Define false modesty and describe how it is used in self-presentation.
- Define self-verification and describe how it is used in self-presentation.
- Define self-monitoring and describe how it is used in self-presentation.

#### 3.3.1. Self-Presentation Defined

Think about the last date you went on, especially a first date. What did you do beforehand? You likely showered and groomed yourself, maybe even rehearsed what you would say in the mirror. You also likely took great care to pick your clothes out to make a good first impression. Any strategies we use to make ourselves appear in a more positive light to others is called **self-presentation**. We intentionally try to control or shape their impressions of us (Schlenker, 2012). First impressions are especially important. Oftentimes, if we make a bad first impression it can be virtually impossible to overcome even if subsequent interactions are much more positive.

### 3.3.2. Specific Strategies Used in Self-Presentation

So that we can successfully shape the view others have of us to be positive, we need to engage in effortful behavior. How so? One strategy is to use **self-promotion** or engaging in behaviors or saying positive things about oneself. We often engage in this type of behavior on a first date or in an interview. Research has also shown that individuals higher in narcissism and lower in self-esteem engage in greater levels of online activity on social networking sites such as Facebook and use more self-promotional content to include About Me, Main Photo, View Photos, and status updates. The study also found gender differences insofar as males engaged in more self-promotion in the About Me and Notes sections while females displayed more self-promotional main photos (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Another strategy is called **ingratiation** or complimenting, flattering, or engaging in other acts that lead a person to do things for you or like you. This is a typical strategy used by salespeople to have you engage in one clear behavior – buy a car or other product. Politicians are known to use the strategy also so that you come to like them while they are campaigning and then subsequently vote for them on election day. Cialdini (2007) writes in his book *Influence: The Power of Persuasion*, “Apparently we have such an automatically positive reaction to compliments that we can fall victim to someone who uses them in an obvious attempt to win our favor” (pg. 176).

Maybe you have been on a team at work before and had an idea that completely revolutionized the way your company completed a service for its clients. Did you gloat about your performance? Not likely. You were more likely to downplay your performance and talk about the contributions of your fellow teammates instead. The end result is that you will be seen as likeable and competent by others but for what is called **false modesty**, you must have been

successful in your performance and others must know about it already (i.e. a fan was watching the big game and saw the wide receiver catch the game winning touchdown).

Another strategy is to choose situations or interpret behavior in ways that confirm already held beliefs or to avoid situations and criticism that might contradict these beliefs. Essentially, we want to confirm our existing self-concept but from the eyes of others. This behavior can best be described as **self-verification**.

Finally, we engage in **self-monitoring** or observing our own behavior so that we can make adjustments to produce the impression we desire in others and to meet the demands of the situation (Snyder, 1987). For instance, a literature review of self-monitoring through paper diaries, the internet, personal digital assistants, and digital scales in relation to weight loss, found that more frequent self-monitoring of diet, physical activity, or weight led to more successful outcomes for weight management (Burke, Wang, & Sevvick, 2011).

### **3.4. Cognitive Biases and Heuristics Used to Bolster the Self**

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Define the self-serving bias.
- Describe how social desirability is a form of the self-serving bias.
- Contrast the false consensus and false uniqueness effects.
- Outline the benefits, and perils, of optimism and pessimism.

Our final section covers cognitive biases and heuristics used to increase our sense of self, though we have discussed others already throughout this module.

### 3.4.1. The Self-Serving Bias

First, the **self-serving bias** is our tendency to see ourselves in a favorable light. We take credit for our successes but blame failures on outside forces. This bias is often displayed by students who are quicker to explain a bad grade on a test as the instructor creating a test that was too difficult or testing on information not in the study guide. When the student does well, though, it is due to their skill and time spent studying, and not necessarily to the test being extra easy.

We even have a tendency to see ourselves as *less* likely to exhibit a self-serving bias than others (Friedrich, 1996; Myers, 1990). Friedrich (1996) documented this effect across two studies. First, 47 upper level undergraduates enrolled in either a statistics or industrial/organizational psychology course completed an anonymous survey at the beginning of class having them read a paragraph about the results of a SAT survey and then respond to a paragraph describing the self-serving bias. At the end they were asked, “How often do you think (you; the average person) make this kind of mistake when judging or evaluating (yourself; him- or herself)?” and indicated their answer on a 9-point scale (1 meaning almost never and 9 indicating nearly all the time). The results showed that students generally saw themselves as significantly less likely to distort their self-perceptions. In the second study, 38 introductory psychology students were lectured on research related to the self-serving bias during the last third of a regularly scheduled class. At the beginning of the next class they were given a questionnaire asking them to what degree they thought that they or the average person (depending on the condition they were in) would make the mistake. The same 9-point scale was used. Results of the second study were consistent with the first such that students believed others are more likely to commit the self-serving bias than they are.

Another way we see the self-serving bias play out in research is through the **social desirability effect** or when participants only provide information that appears to be what is expected by society or is desirable. If asked questions about sexual activity, some may report lower levels of activity than is true or not mention acts of sexual impropriety. Though our society has become sexually charged, there are still limits to what is acceptable. We will talk more about self-serving behavior when we discuss attribution theory in Module 4.

**3.4.1.1. Explaining self-serving bias.** So, what are potential causes of the self-serving bias? In a 2008 article, Shepperd, Malone, and Sweeny cite a few different classes of explanations. First, the previously discussed self-enhancement and self-presentation are offered as motivation-driven reasons (please see the previous sections for a discussion).

Second, they offer cognitive-driven explanations. The *outcomes might be inconsistent with expectations* such that our expectations are grounded in experience and we utilize cognitive mechanisms that might mute, dampen, or even erase previous negative experiences but not positive ones. *Our outcomes may also not be consistent with our self-schema* meaning that our views of our skills and abilities are often overly positive and that we view ourselves as the kind of person who produces positive outcomes, not negative ones. Positive outcomes are consistent with our self-schema while negative outcomes lead to two possible conclusions: the negative outcome had an internal cause and our positive self-schema is not correct, or the negative outcome had an external cause and our positive self-schema remains intact. A third possibility is that *outcomes are inconsistent with actions*. Positive expectations usually lead to goal-directed behavior. The authors offer the example of a boy who prepares to ask a girl out on a date by rehearsing what he will say, dressing nice, and acting charming. If she accepts his offer, he will see it as due to his efforts but if she rejects him, he will likely regroup and try again a few times.

If the answer continues to be ‘no’ then he will believe the cause is not with him but something external.

A fourth cognitive explanation is called *biased hypothesis-testing*. When failure occurs in place of expected success, we are likely to ask ‘why did this happen?’ Like scientist’s, people form hypotheses to answer the question and then collect data to test it. But they are often not good scientists and engage in confirmation bias and see only information that confirms rather than disconfirms their hypothesis. People also find case-positive information more diagnostic than case-negative. Finally, people engage in *different standards of proof* in which they form a proposition or hypothesis and proceed to evaluate evidence. Unlike biased hypothesis-testing though, they consider all information and do not omit disconfirming evidence. How much information is needed to accept or reject their hypothesis also varies insofar as they require more information to accept an undesired hypothesis and less for a desired hypothesis. For instance, the specific hypothesis tested (i.e. ‘Am I smart?’ or ‘Am I stupid?’) determines what information is sought out in biased hypothesis testing while in different standards of proof the exact hypothesis determines how much information is required to draw a conclusion (more proof for the question centered on whether they are stupid and less for if they are smart).

Shepperd, Malone, and Sweeny (2008) conclude that the self-serving bias can only be understood using both motivational and cognitive driven explanations.

### 3.4.2. Overestimating Our Opinions and Skills

People often overestimate to what degree their opinion is shared by others. This tendency is called the **false consensus effect** (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). It may occur because people are biased in viewing their own positions as what everyone else subscribes to as well, or because

they overgeneralize from case information with their opinion serving as one salient type of case information (Alicke & Largo, 1995). The false consensus effect has been demonstrated in regard to smoking behavior (thinking that half or more than half of adults or peers smoked led to the most smoking involvement; Botvin et al., 1992); drug use (Wolfson, 2000); engaging in health protective or defeating behaviors (Suls, Wan, & Sanders, 1988); a willingness to escalate a disturbance (Russell & Arms, 1995); presidential preferences such that supporters of a candidate predicted a higher percentage of support for the candidate than other candidates (Brown, 1982); determining the extent to which other voters would vote like you (Koestner et al., 1995); and illicit drug use by elite athletes (Dunn, Thomas, Swift, & Burns, 2011).

Likewise, we tend to underestimate to what degree others share our abilities and skills. This tendency is called the **false uniqueness effect**. We might see our math ability as rare, our future to be brighter, or our opinion of a social matter to be more desirable. One study found that participants believed their first name to be unique, whether it was rare or common. The effect held for both male and female names and the researchers also found that when we consider making a name change, rare names are often considered (Kulig, 2013).

### 3.4.3. Optimism...to the Extreme

Of course, seeing the jar as half full and not half empty has obvious benefits for mental health. This is the essence of the difference between being optimistic and pessimistic. Scheier and Carver (1985) offered a theory of **dispositional optimism** which defines it as, “a stable individual difference that reflects the general perception that future positive outcomes will be common and future negative outcomes will be rare” (Gallagher, Lopez, & Pressman, 2012). Research has shown that being optimistic results in higher levels of subjective well-being for

college students (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009) and adults (Isaacowitz, 2005), leads to more adaptive coping mechanisms (Carver et al., 2009; Nes & Segerstrom, 2006), can bring about greater success on the job (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), results in goal attainment (Segerstrom & Nes, 2006), and brings about better physical health (Giltay et al., 2004).

Is optimism universal? Gallagher, Lopez, and Pressman (2012) conducted a study using representative samples from 142 countries numbering over 150,000 participants and found that individuals of all ages, races, education levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds and most countries are optimistic and that this optimism leads to better subjective well-being and health. Optimism is not merely a benefit of living in an industrialized nation either.

But is there such a thing as being too optimistic to the point of being unrealistic? The answer is yes and Weinstein (1980) identified a tendency people have to think they are invulnerable and that others will be the victims of misfortune but not themselves. He called this error in judgment, which results in a bias towards favorable outcomes, **unrealistic optimism**. For instance, college students in one study were unrealistically optimistic about the likelihood they would develop alcohol related problems in the future such as having a hangover, missing classes, or having an argument with a friend over their drinking. The negative consequences of unrealistic optimism were found to be both proximal and distal (Dillard, Midboe, & Klein, 2009). Another study found that patient's participating in early-phase oncology trials display the unrealistic optimism bias in relation to their expectation of the therapeutic benefit of the trial and that this tendency can undermine the informed consent of participants (Jansen et al., 2011).

Everything is not always roses and so expressing some pessimism can actually help us to be realistic. **Defensive pessimism** can help us manage our anxiety and pursue our goals by setting low expectations and mentally exploring possible outcomes of goal-relevant tasks



(Norem, 2008; Norem & Cantor, 1986). Hazlett, Molden, and Sackett (2011) found that participants who were focused on growth and advancement preferred optimistic forecasts and perform better when they express an optimistic outlook while those who were concerned with safety and security preferred pessimistic forecasts and perform better when they express a pessimistic outlook.

### **Module Recap**

That's it. We spent an entire module talking about our – self and should feel no guilt over it. Kidding. To be serious though, we all try and answer the question of who we are and philosophers have been tackling issues related to what it means to be human and matters of human existence since the dawn of time. Our discussion focused on the self-concept, self-esteem, self-presentation, and biases and heuristics we make/use to protect our sense of self. We hope you enjoyed the wide array of issues we covered and with this topic out of the way, we can now continue our discussion in Part II of how we think about ourselves and others by focusing on 'others.' After this, we will round out Part II by discussing the attitudes we have about ourselves, others, and things in our world.

## Part II. How We Think About Ourselves and Others

### Module 4: The Perception of Others

## **Module 4: The Perception of Others**

### **Module Overview**

In Module 4 we continue our discussion of perception but move from how the self is perceived and constructed in the mind to a discussion of how others are. We will frame our discussion around social cognition theory and the process of collecting and assessing information about others. To really understand this process, we have to first understand how communication occurs in the nervous system. Then we will discuss what information we obtain, factors on how this information is obtained, the meaning we assign to the information we collect in terms of categories and schemas, how accurate these schemas are, and finally the judgments we form. From this we will tackle the issue of how we determine the cause of a person's behavior, called attribution theory. We will discuss dispositional and situational attributions and then two theories explaining attribution. We will conclude by describing types of cognitive errors we make when explaining behavior.

### **Module Outline**

- 4.1. Person Perception
- 4.2. Attribution Theory

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Identify typical pieces of information we obtain about others to form judgements about them.
- Clarify how accurate our schemas and judgments of others are.
- Clarify how attribution theory explains the reason why a behavior was made.

## 4.1. Person Perception

### Section Learning Objectives

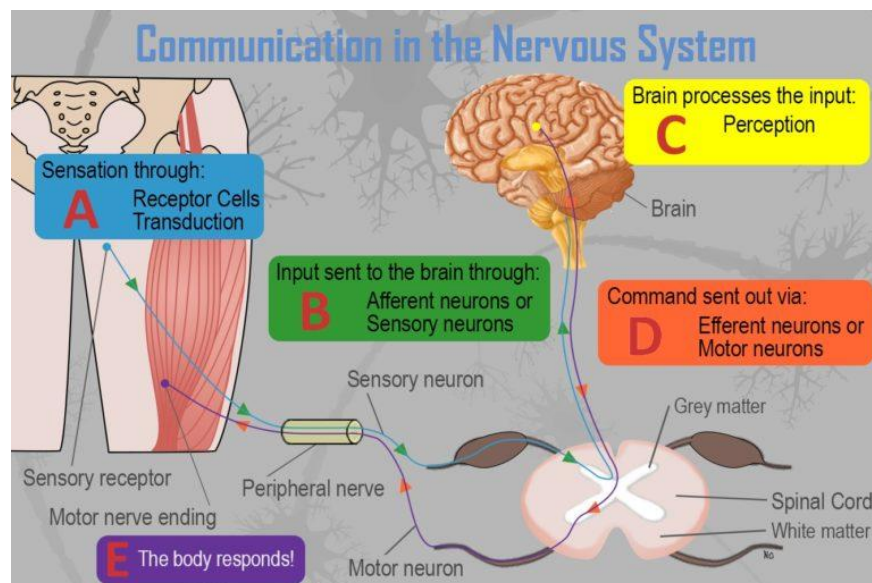
- Define person or social perception.
- Outline how communication in the nervous system occurs.
- Identify the parts of the nervous system.
- Define social cognition and show how it relates to the communication model.
- Outline and describe the types of information we collect from others.
- Differentiate the negativity effect and the positivity bias.
- Clarify what the halo effect is.
- Define perceptual set.
- Explain how deception is used in revealing who we are.
- Outline how we assign meaning when we assess.
- Differentiate and exemplify the three types of schemas.
- Contrast group stereotypes, prototypes, and exemplars.
- Describe the benefits of schemas.
- Clarify how accurate our schemas are, defining key terms.
- Identify the connection between schemas and memory.
- Identify the connection between schemas and behavior.
- List and describe heuristics we use in relation to schemas.
- Identify factors on our judgments.
- Explain what priming, framing, affective forecasting, and the overconfidence phenomenon are.

### 4.1.1. Elementary Social Neuroscience

To begin our discussion of how we perceive others we will sort of take a step back and discuss communication in the nervous system. Why is that? When we use the term **person perception** or **social perception**, as it is also known, we are discussing how we go about learning about people, whether significant others, family, close friends, co-workers, or strangers on the street. This process begins by first detecting them in our environment. How so?

**4.1.1.1. Communication in the nervous system.** Figure 4.1 gives us an indication of how this universal process works regardless of where a person lives. In regards to how well our senses operate, how our nervous system carries messages to and from the brain, and/or in how the brain processes the information, there can of course be differences from person to person.

*Figure 4.1. Communication in the Nervous System*



- A. Receptor cells in each of the five sensory systems detect energy. The detection of physical energy emitted or reflected by physical objects is called **sensation**. The five sensory systems include vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.
- B. This information is passed to the nervous system via the neural impulse and due to the process of **transduction** or converting physical energy into electrochemical codes. *Sensory* or *afferent* neurons, which are part of the peripheral nervous system, do the work of carrying information to the brain.
- C. The information is received by brain structures (central nervous system) and perception occurs. What the brain receives is a lot of raw sensory data and this has to be interpreted, or meaning added to it, which is where **perception** comes in.
- D. Once the information has been interpreted, commands are sent out, telling the body how to respond (Step E), also via the peripheral nervous system and the action of *motor* or *efferent* neurons.

**4.1.1.2. The parts of the nervous system.** The nervous system consists of two main parts – the central and peripheral nervous systems. The **central nervous system (CNS)** is the control center for the nervous system which receives, processes, interprets, and stores incoming sensory information. It consists of the brain and spinal cord. The **peripheral nervous system** consists of the nervous system outside the brain and spinal cord. It handles the CNS's input and output and divides into the somatic and autonomic nervous systems.

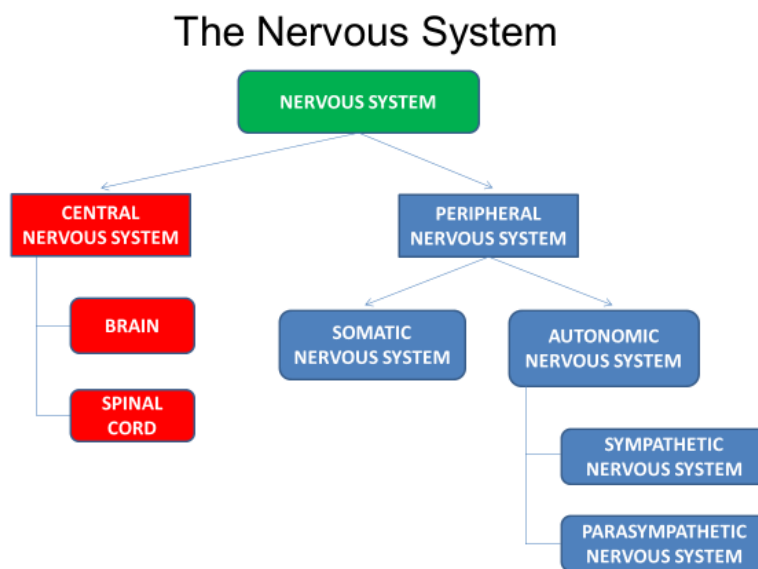
The **somatic nervous system** allows for voluntary movement by controlling the skeletal muscles and carries sensory information to the CNS. The **autonomic nervous system** regulates

the functioning of blood vessels, glands, and internal organs such as the bladder, stomach, and heart. It consists of sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

The **sympathetic nervous system** is involved when a person is intensely aroused. It provides the strength to fight back or to flee (fight-or-flight instinct). Eventually the response brought about by the sympathetic nervous system must end. The **parasympathetic nervous system** calms the body.

For a visual breakdown of the nervous system, please see Figure 4.2 below.

*Figure 4.2. The Structure of the Nervous System*



#### 4.1.2. Social Cognition

With this foundation set, let's apply what we have learned to social psychology. **Social cognition** refers to the study of the process of collecting and assessing information about others

so that we can draw inferences and form impressions about them. Consider the terms *collecting* and *assessing* in this definition. First, collecting. In Section 4.1.1. we defined sensation as detecting physical energy emitted or reflected by physical objects. This is what the definition of social cognition is referring to. Think about the students in your class or those you work with. What information do you collect or sense about them? Which sensory organs are you using? Do you see them? Smell them? Hear them? Now consider the lecture you might be experiencing. You see the professor move around the room or make gestures with their hands or face. You hear their words. You also see the lecture on the screen and form some impressions about the professor's ability to present information on a slide based on the text that is included or the specific images that are used.

Once you have obtained this social information via the senses and the process of sensation, what do you do with it? Well, it is passed to the brain via the neural impulse and it is processed there. This 'processing' involves assessing the information we have obtained and adding meaning to it, and so assessing is the same as perceiving. We add some type of meaning to the raw sensory data.

We hope for now you understand how social cognition basically is an applied version of sensation and perception. Now we can dive more into what information we gather and how exactly we assess it.

#### **4.1.3. The Information We Collect – The Work of Sensation**

Go back to the answer you gave for what information you gather from others, whether in the class you are in or people you work with. What did it include? The information we gather or collect from our social world through the process of sensation is just one step in making an



inference. In addition to collecting data, we also have to decide what information will be useful to us and then integrate it, the focus of Section 4.1.4. From this we can form a judgment, which will be discussed in Section 4.1.5.

**4.1.3.1. Types of information: Physical cues.** The information you notice first is probably what the person looks like or what they are wearing. We also notice behavior too. From this we infer certain qualities about them. What if we are working in the library and as we look around we see someone wearing all black, a satin bodice or corset, stripped stockings or tights, frilly or laced gloves, fishnet tights, spiker heels, sheer stockings or suspenders, dyed hair, piercings, sunglasses, silver skulls for jewelry, and/or blood red nail polish. This is not the typical person we see in a library and we might think they are there for a non-academic reason. Of course, on a university campus we see all different types of people and so diversity is not necessarily a shock. But this type of extreme behavior and appearance might be. As you will see shortly, we would then assign this person to the category Goth for which we have certain schemas.

**4.1.3.2. Types of information: Salience.** Our discussion of Goth in relation to physical cues leads to a discussion of salience or when something in our world stands out. A Goth individual in a library would be salient. If this same individual was at a Rave, they would likely not be regarded as engaging in strange or non-normative behavior. If we showed up wearing khakis and a polo shirt we might be considered out of place or salient. Consider that one of the principles of perceptual organization put forth by the Gestalt psychologists, called **figure-ground**. **Figure-ground** indicates that figure stands out against ground in our perceptual field. So, if a horse is running across a field, the horse would be figure and the field would be ground. The library would be ground in our example and the Goth individual is figure. Novel, colorful,

noisy, smelly, strong tasting, or sticky stimuli are **salient** or stand out. From the perspective of sensation, you might say they attract our attention and are deemed emotionally important stimuli.

**4.1.3.3. Types of information: Facial expressions.** Another piece of information we obtain from others is their facial expression. If you tell a joke and the other person starts to smile (a genuine smile too) then you know your joke was funny and that you made them happy. If a doctor gives a patient news of a terminal illness, the patient will likely display a facial expression of shock or even concern. If a loved one was killed in a car accident you would likely display deep sadness, shock, and agony. So facial expressions provide us with information about what others are feeling.

**4.1.3.4. Types of information: Personality traits.** At the gym I attend on the campus of my university there is a girl who works there who is incredibly sociable, or *extroverted*, as the personality trait is termed. I usually listen to music as I work out, but she is so loud I can hear her over my music. I would not classify that information as being related to physical cues since she is dressed in the same uniform as her colleagues. You could say her behavior is different, as most employees do not laugh out loud or jump around, making it salient as well. From seeing how she acts, I have inferred she is the life of the party and likes being the center of attention, typical of extroverts. Learning this about her might lead me to make predictions about her future behavior. So, if I know she is due to work I will expect much of the same, slightly obnoxious behavior. You might make the case that if her behavior is subdued something is wrong. Consider this as we discuss attribution behavior in Section 4.2.

**4.1.3.5. Types of information: Eye contact.** What might the amount of eye contact a person makes say about them? If someone fails to ever make eye contact this could imply they have confidence issues, are feeling guilt or shame over some action, or are insincere. Think about

a professor teaching a class. If they never look into the student's eyes this could indicate they do not know the content that is being presented very well and is hoping no one questions them on it. On August 21, 2014 Forbes published an article on eye contact and stated that too much eye contact can be a bad thing too. Why is that? It could indicate that the person is intentionally trying to dominate, intimidate, or belittle another person and is seen as rude or hostile. But there are cases when we do maintain eye contact for longer periods of time such as when holding a more intense or intimate conversation. Generally, the greater the eye contact, the closer the relationship. Speakers who actively seek out eye contact are judged to be more believable, competent, and confident as with the case of our instructor. Finally, how much is the right amount of eye contact? Forbes says, "As a general rule, though, direct eye contact ranging from 30% to 60% of the time during a conversation - more when you are listening, less when you are speaking - should make for a comfortable productive atmosphere." For more from this article, please visit: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2014/08/21/facinating-facts-about-eye-contact/#a46d3391e26d>.

**4.1.3.6 Types of information: Moral character.** When we gather information about others, we will also notice anything that speaks to their moral character. If the person is seen stealing money from a cash register or engaging in reckless behavior behind the wheel, we may assume they are egotistical, self-serving, or morally inept. If they stop to help an elderly person cross the street or to rescue someone trapped in a burning building, we will assume they are benevolent, just, and caring. Is it really that easy to judge the moral character of another person though? A 2017 article published by Science Daily points out that not only are deeds important, but so is the context. Work by Clayton Critcher of the Hass Marketing Group indicates that "people can do what is considered the wrong thing but actually be judged more moral for that

decision.” Consider the following situation. John Q. Archibald is a factory worker facing a financial crisis due to his employer reducing paid hours. At the same time, his son, Michael, is stricken during a baseball game only to learn that the boy needs an emergency heart transplant. Though the parents do have health insurance, the policy will not pay for the procedure. John is able to convince heart surgeon, Dr. Raymond Turner, to reduce his fee for the surgery but still, the financial burden of the surgery is too much to bear. Faced with having to take their son home to die, John snaps and takes the staff and patients of the emergency room hostage. He becomes a media hero and the focus of intense media coverage, all while the police department tries to resolve the situation peacefully. So, was this a real life event? No. It is actually the plot of the Denzel Washington movie, John Q, from 2002, though director Nick Cassavetes experienced a real-life crisis that mirrored the events of the movie (See [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/john\\_q/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/john_q/)). What type of person should we assume John Q is? Is he a morally depraved person or was he more a victim of circumstance? Though he may have handled the situation differently, he was ultimately judged to be moral for his actions. What do you think you would do as a parent who experienced something similar with their own child? To read the whole Science Daily article, please visit:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170503092155.htm>.

**4.1.3.7. Types of information: Nonverbal communication.** When we think of communication, we consider the words we say or write. But actions, and specifically body language, speaks louder than words. If you are talking to someone and they are slouched down, this may indicate they are not confident. What if they have locked their arms in front of themselves? Or what if they maintain an open body posture? This all provides us information about their intentions and personality. The distance someone stands from us also provides

information. A person stands closer when they are friendlier and intimate with the other individual, such as how close you might stand in relation to your significant other compared to your boss or a coworker.

According to Psychology Today, it is believed that 55% of communication comes through our body language while 38% is derived from tone of voice and the final 7% from spoken words (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967). But is this true? They say both yes and no as the formula applies to certain situations and so should not be used as the sole deciding factor in understanding the person's behavior or the situation. Accuracy is increased if we consider **the three C's of nonverbal communication**. First, we need to take into consideration the context of the situation or the environment it is taking place in, the history of the people engaged in meaningful discourse, and the role each person holds such as boss and employee or mother and child. Second, we should look for nonverbal gestures in *clusters* or groups so that no single gesture comes to define a person's state of mind or emotion. The person who locks their arms can only be considered close-minded and resistant to new ideas or contradictory information if they engage in this behavior whenever they talk to other people. We are looking for a pattern of behavior. They may be standing like this right now because they are cold and trying to capture body heat but do not usually make this gesture. Finally, *congruence* or when our words match our body language is key. If you give a person bad news such as a loved one dying and they say they are fine when asked, their body language should be considered. If they have tears in their eyes or are showing other visible signs of being upset, their actions and words are not congruent and you should be concerned.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-words/201109/is-nonverbal-communication-numbers-game>

**4.1.3.8. Negativity effect or positivity bias?** Consider that negative aspects of a person's behavior or personality stand out more and are attended to more, even when equally extreme positive information is present. This is called the **negativity effect** (Kellermann, 1984; 1989). One reason this might be so is that negative information could indicate a threat in our environment, especially if someone is displaying erratic behavior. Negative information leads us to ignore or reject other people and any additional information that may contradict this initial impression. So, we will continue seeing that person with erratic behavior in that way. The negativity effect has been documented in political perception (Klein, 1996; Lau, 1982), consumer familiarity with brands (Ahluwalia, 2002), trait ratings and free response impression descriptions (Vonk, 1993), and attitude change to a retailer following exposure to either moderately negative or positive publicity (Liu, Wang, & Wu, 2010), to name a few.

Despite this, we have a tendency to evaluate people positively, called the **positivity bias**. Consider that most behavior a person makes is positive since their actions are controlled by social norms and that we remember positive information more effectively than negative information. It is interesting to note that Dodds et al. (2015) found evidence for a positivity bias in human language such that, and supporting the Pollyanna hypothesis (Boucher & Osgood, 1969), positive words are more prevalent, hold more meaning, are used more diversely, and are easily learned. Their study involved the selection of 10,000 words from 10 different languages each.

Armed with this positive information about a person we then tend to assume other positive qualities, called the **halo effect** (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). So, if a person is really nice, we will also assume they are attractive or intelligent. If rude, we will see them as unintelligent or unattractive. In an interesting application of the halo effect, Sine, Shane, and Di Gregorio (2003)

explored whether institutional prestige affected the rate of annual technology licensing across 102 universities and from 1991-1998. Their results confirmed the presence of a halo effect such that universities with higher prestige had a higher licensing rate. One implication of this finding is important because as the authors state, “if external perceptions of organizations are narrow in scope and solely dependent on organizational past performance, then actors can use external perceptions to influence market transactions only in similar settings” (pg. 494) such that if the English or history departments are highly ranked nontechnical departments, the university could use this external perception to license more of its inventions.

**4.1.3.9. The role of our emotional state on the information we attend to.** How might you interpret a person’s behavior or words if you are in a good mood? What about if in a bad mood? **Perceptual set** indicates the influence of our beliefs, attitudes, biases, stereotypes, and ... well, mood, on how we perceive and respond to events in our world! We might regard a joke our friend says as funny when we are happy but see it as ill-timed or out of poor taste if we are in a bad mood, depending on the nature of the stressor that placed us in a bad mood.

**4.1.3.10. Deception in revealing who we are.** We sometimes employ deception in our interactions with others as a way to mask our true feelings or intentions, or to spare their feelings. **Nonverbal leakage** (Ekman & Friesen, 1969) refers to the fact that when we are interacting with another person, we have a tendency to focus more on what we are saying and less on what we are doing. As such, our true motives may be revealed indirectly. For instance, you might have received a gift from your significant other last Christmas that you did not like, but still smiled upon opening it and told this person how much you liked it. A smile that reflects genuine happiness is called a **Duchenne smile** while a fake smile is called a **non-Duchenne**

**smile.** Could you tell the two apart if you were wondering if your significant other liked the give you gave him/her?

Also, **microexpressions** are facial expressions that are made briefly, involuntarily, and last on the face for no more than 500 milliseconds (Yan et al., 2013). It is possible that being able to read them could reveal a person's true feelings on a matter (Porter & Brinke, 2008) and evidence exists for the ability to train people to read these facial expressions (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2011). This skill would be particularly useful for law enforcement officials (Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991).

#### **4.1.4. The Meaning We Assign When We Assess – The Work of Perception**

**4.1.4.1. Categories and schemas.** One way we assign meaning is to use the information we collected to assign the person to a **category** or group, which makes them seem less like distinct individuals. Each category has a **schema** or a set of beliefs or expectations about the group that are presumed to apply to all members of the group and are based on experience we have had with other members of that group. For instance, you likely have assigned the instructor of your social psychology class to the group, professor, for which you have a schema and specific beliefs or expectations such as this person being formal, eccentric, very intelligent, gifted at oration, organized, and tolerant. This is based on your past experiences with course instructors and maybe even what you learned from others (secondhand information).

**4.1.4.2. Types of schemas.** We have several types of schemas that we use to assign meaning to our world. First, there are **role schemas**, which relate to how people carrying out certain roles or jobs are to act. For instance, what is the role schema you have for someone



working in your Human Resources office at work? What about the cashier at your local grocery store?

Another schema we have is called the **person schema** and relates to certain types of people such as firefighters, geeks, or jocks. For each of these people, we have specific beliefs and expectations about what their personality is like and how they are to behave in various situations. What traits do you believe cheerleaders hold?

The final schema is called an **event schema** or **script**. This type of schema tells us what is to occur in certain situations such as at a party or in a chemistry lab. The parking garage I use daily requires me to swipe my card as I enter. Now the garage houses more than just those with my special permit. It is used as a public parking lot too. Recently, the gate as you exit has been broken and so left up. Usually when I leave I would swipe my card again, thereby causing the gate to go up. What I have to do when entering and exiting the lot is usually pretty clear. Since the gate is just up now, I have been confused what to do when I get to the pay station. I have been trying to swipe my card again but really, it's not needed. The gate is up already. I finally asked what to do and the parking attendant told me that those with parking permits can just pass through. Until this point, I was afraid to just go through, even though I have an orange permit sticker on the bottom left of my windshield. I was not sure if the university would consider my behavior to be trying to skip payment and send the police after me. The broken gate has left my event schema in turmoil. Hopefully it is fixed soon. That is the gate, not my event schema. I guess you could say by fixing the gate they restore my event schema too.

Let's put them all three schemas together. Imagine you are at a football game for your favorite team, whether high school, college, or professional. Who are some of the people there? Fans, coaches, players, referees, announcers, cheerleaders, and medical staff are all present. We

expect the fans to be rowdy and supportive of the team by doing the wave or cheering. We expect the head coach to make good decisions and to challenge poor decisions by the referees. To that end, we expect the referees to be fair, impartial, and accurate in the judgments they make. We would not be surprised if they threw a flag or blew a whistle. Cheerleaders should be peppy, cheerful, and do all types of gymnastics on the field and waive pom poms. Etc... These are the main people involved in the football game. In terms of roles, the head coach fulfills the role of leader of the team along with the Quarterback. The role of promoting team spirit and energizing the crowd goes to the cheerleaders and maybe some key players on the field. The medical staff are there to diagnose and treat injuries as they occur and so their role is to keep everyone safe. Finally, what do we do as a fan when we attend a football game? We have to enter the stadium and likely go through a search of our bags and present our ticket. We walk to our assigned seat. Though we cheer our team on, we need to be respectful of those around us such as not yelling obscenities if children are nearby. We also are expected to participate in the wave and sing the team's fight song. Etc.... These are the event schemas that dictates our behavior.

Other types of schemas are worth mentioning. A **group stereotype** includes our beliefs about what are the typical traits or characteristics of members of a specific group. We will discuss this in more detail in Module 9. **Prototypes** are schemas used for special types of people or situations while **exemplars** are perfect examples of that prototype. If we are starting a new job we will have a prototype for what a boss is and then compare our new boss against really good, and really bad, bosses we have had in the past.

**4.1.4.3. The benefits of schemas.** When we meet someone, we collect the aforementioned information and use it to place them in a category for which we have a schema.

If this sounds like a pretty simple and automatic process, you are correct. As such, it should not be surprising to learn that schemas *make cognitive processing move quicker*. But they *also complete incomplete pictures* in terms of what we know about someone. Though we may not know Johnny personally, placing him in the schema football player helps us to fill in these blanks about what his personality is like and how he might behave. Using our schema for football player we can now *predict* what a *future interaction* with Johnny might involve. Let's say he is assigned to be our lab partner in chemistry. We use our schema to make a quick assessment if the experience of working with him might be pleasant or unpleasant and we might be able to predict what his level of involvement in the project will be as well as the potential quality of his work.

**4.1.4.4. The accuracy of our schemas.** To reap the benefits of schemas they have to be accurate. So how accurate are our schemas? Think about the last party you attended. Let's say that a guy, John, sees a girl, Alyssa, whom he thinks is cute and goes up to talk to her. Before even saying a word, John has gathered a lot of information about Alyssa. He sees the clothes she is wearing, smells her perfume as he gets closer, and maybe can hear her talk. They have a brief conversation in which he gathers additional information through the words she uses, how she talks, her facial expressions, voice inflections and tone, and her body language. He uses this information to classify Alyssa as an introvert. Let's face it, she seemed very shy and reserved and not the outgoing life of the party he thought she was, or maybe heard from others. John has just taken this information to place Alyssa in a category, introverted, for which he has a very clear schema. Is he correct? Possibly. But what if he later learns from another friend that Alyssa's cat of 10 years died earlier that day and that she was incredibly sad about it? Will he change his schema and give her a second chance?

Likely not. Due to what is called **belief perseverance**, John will maintain the schema he already formed. As such, we really need to consider our initial interaction with a stranger as this first impression, called the **primacy effect**, is likely to stick even if we receive contradictory information later. Alyssa is now, and will forever be, an introvert in John's mind. This seems almost illogical in some way but work by Guenther and Alicke (2008) suggest that belief perseverance occurs because we are motivated to maintain a relatively favorable self-image and so discredited feedback given to participants about their performance on a word-identification task threatens an important aspect of their self-concept. In a classic study of belief perseverance, Carretta and Moreland (1982) conducted a field demonstration and assessed voter perceptions of Richard Nixon shortly before the U.S. Senate's Watergate hearings began, during the Memorial Day recess, and just after testimony by John Dean. Results showed that respondents who said they voted for Nixon in 1972 persisted in their positive evaluation of him while those who voted for McGovern became more negative in their beliefs.

Finally, **confirmatory hypothesis testing** occurs when we select information from others that confirms an existing belief or schema. If we believe, for instance, that a person is trying to take advantage of us we will only take note of behaviors that indicate manipulation and ignore other behaviors in which they may be trying to help us.

So though schemas make processing quicker and more complete, they could also lead us to drawing the wrong conclusion or oversimplifying a situation. This in turn may bias us in future interactions with a person or group and to maintain the content of our schema even if information to the contrary is experienced.

**4.1.4.5. Schemas and memory.** Schemas might be regarded as filters of sort, affecting three different memory processes. First, they affect what specific aspects of our environment we

attend to. In general, information not consistent with an existing schema is ignored unless it is so extreme, we have no choice but to attend to it (Fiske, 1993). Second, the long-term memory process of *encoding* is when we attend to, take in, and process information, which for our purposes leads to the formation of a schema. Information consistent with an existing schema is easier to remember but if the schema has not formed yet, information that is inconsistent with it is easier to remember (Stangor & Ruble, 1989). Finally, and related to the process of retrieval, Conway and Ross (1984) found that when a schema is activated, we tend to recall information that makes up the schema or is congruent with it. Memory research further confirms this finding in that a sin of omission is what is called the **consistency bias**, or our tendency to recall events in a way consistent with our beliefs and biases. Also, the **misinformation effect** occurs when we receive misleading information about a recently witnessed event and then incorporate this inaccurate information into our memory of the event (Loftus & Hunter, 1989; Loftus, 1975).

**4.1.4.6. Schemas and behavior.** There are times when predictions are made about us or by us that eventually come true since we engage in behavior that confirms these expectations. We call these **self-fulfilling prophecies** (Merton, 1948) and they show one way that schemas affect our behavior. Maybe you have been told you will be really bad at bowling because you are not coordinated enough, or your arm is not strong enough to hold the ball. You go bowling and sure enough, they were right. Your ball spends more time in the gutter than down the middle of the lane. Pikhartova, Bowling, and Victor (2015) found that in a sample of 4465 participants aged 50 and over, stereotypes and expectations about being lonely later in life were significantly associated with self-reports of loneliness 8 years later. The authors suggest that interventions be developed to change age-related stereotypes at the population level to reduce loneliness in the elderly.

What if we led teachers to believe some kids were really good at math while others were horrible at it? What do you think might happen to the children's performance? Sure enough, when teachers were led to expect enhanced performance, they got it. The same was true for poor performance (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The effect holds true today as well. For instance, Friedrich et al. (2015) found that in a sample of 73 teachers and 1289 5<sup>th</sup> grade students that teacher expectancies affected grades and achievement test scores at the individual level, student's self-concept partly mediated teacher expectancy effects, and the teacher effect disappeared at the classroom level when student's prior achievement was controlled for. This tendency for students to perform as teachers expect them to is called the **teacher expectancy effect** or **Pygmalion effect** and is a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers hold certain beliefs and expectations about the personality and behavior of poor and exceptional students and this in turn affects their performance.

Another way we see the self-fulfilling prophecy play out is in respect to what are called placebos. Consider that if a patient knows they are in the experimental drug group which is meant to cure depression, they will likely show marked reduction in depression compared to a control group that knew they received no help to reduce their depressive thoughts. Are the results of the study due to the actual action of the new drug, or due to the expectations the participants had of the drug's ability to 'cure' their depression? We really do not know. By telling them they are in the drug group, the researcher obtains the exact results they expected...or the improvement of the group is a self-fulfilling prophecy. To know if the drug is as good as we think it is, two groups are used and both groups are given a pill. One is the experimental drug and a second, the **placebo** or sugar pill, looks identical to the drug. By appearing the same and both groups

receiving a pill, no participant knows which group they have been randomly assigned to and cannot affect the results of the experiment.

**4.1.4.7. Schemas and heuristics.** As we saw above, schemas do aid us in pretty important ways. We cannot really process all the sensory information we collect on a daily basis on a deeper level, and so we have to make quick judgments. But as we also saw, this can be done in error at times. To round out this section, we thought it would be good to discuss common cognitive errors we make in the form of **heuristics**, or mental shortcuts used to solve problems or to help explain ambiguous information.

First, the **representativeness heuristic** (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972) takes information we sense or collect from our environment and matches it against existing schemas, to determine if the match is correct. We attempt to determine how likely something is by how well it represents a prototype. Of course, the problem is that we may ignore other information that is relevant. Arising from the representativeness heuristic is the **conjunction error** which occurs when a person assumes that events that appear to go together will occur together. Consider the following: *“Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.”* What if you were given a set of occupations and avocations associated with Linda and asked to what degree does she resemble the typical members of her class? These included Linda being an elementary school teacher, Linda working in a bookstore and taking yoga classes, Linda being active in the feminist movement, Linda being a psychiatric social worker, Linda being a bank teller, Linda being an insurance salesperson, and Linda being a bank teller and active in the feminist movement. Results showed that of 88 undergraduate students, 85% predicted that she was a bank teller and active in the

feminist movement. The students ranked the conjunction (Linda being a bank teller and active in the feminist movement) as more probable than the two avocations separately (Tversky & Kahneman, 1983).

What if you were asked how fast a fellow sprinter on the track team was? To figure out the answer you would compare her speed with your own. If you determine she is faster than you, then your response would be she is very fast. But if slower than you, you would say she runs slow. The **anchoring and adjustment heuristic** (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) helps us answer questions such as this by starting with an initial value, oftentimes the self, when asked to make a social judgment, and then adjust accordingly. But is the self enough? Results of two sets of experiments show that adjustments “...tend to be insufficient because people tend to stop adjusting soon after reaching a satisfactory value, and adjustment-based anchoring biases are reduced when people are motivated and able to think harder than they might normally” (Epley & Gilovich, 2006, pg. 316).

We also have a tendency to focus on distinctive features of a person and ignore or underuse information that describes most people, called the **base-rate fallacy**. We tend to be influenced by outliers in our data about this group, or by extreme members. Think about the last football game you attended. If some fans of the visiting team acted rowdy and were hostile to the players from your team, you would tend to see all fans of this team in this way. Of course, you would be wrong. An explanation of why we commit this fallacy is that people order information by its perceived degree of relevance and so information deemed to be highly relevant will dominate or take precedence over low-relevance information (Bar-Hillel, 1980).



#### 4.1.5. The Results of Social Cognition: The Judgments We Form

**4.1.5.1. Factors on our judgments.** Several factors affect the judgments we make. First, consider that our judgment of a person or situation could be affected by *biased information* we have received. Maybe we have decided that a new colleague we have had limited contact with is not a nice person due to what a friend tells us about them. Of course, we do not know that our friend does not like this individual for personal reasons and nothing specific that the person has done. Hence, the friend has affected our judgment of the new employee by providing us with biased information. Additionally, we may make an inference about a person or group based on a *very limited amount of information*. Maybe we are only basing our opinion of the person on what we heard about them from a few others (assume the information is not biased) or when we saw them walking down the hall. How can you really make any type of accurate judgment in this situation?

What we expect of this person could be based on *prior expectations* which can be faulty. Maybe we remember that the person who held their job previously was fairly incompetent and lazy and so we believe them to be so. You may not realize how this faulty prior expectation is affecting your current expectation of the new current worker and that it may stop you from collecting information about the new worker that suggests he/she will be a model employee and colleague.

**Priming** occurs when a word or idea used in the present affects the evaluation of new information in the future (Tulving & Schachter, 1990). In a prototypical experiment such as using a word-stem completion test, participants are asked to study a series of words and then a delay of several minutes to several hours occurs. They are then given three-letter word stems with multiple possible completions and asked to complete each stem with whatever word comes

to mind such as being given most and then finishing it with motel or mother. Participants tend to complete the stems with words that were studied earlier than words that were not (Schacter & Buckner, 1998). In one study, researchers unobtrusively primed economic schemas (knowledge structures that emphasize being rational, efficient, and self-interest) and found that the compassion individuals expressed to others decreased as compared to the control condition. This effect was mediated by dampened feelings of empathy and making the expression of emotions seem unprofessional. Mundane and psychological realism was obtained by presenting working managers with situations they would likely encounter in their professional roles such as delivering negative feedback to a team member or transferring an employee to an undesirable city, asking participants to write a letter they believed would be delivered to a student about loss of their scholarship, or making time to meet with recipients of bad news about the loss of a scholarship or being cut from the soccer team (Molinsky, Grant, & Margolis, 2012).

One other factor on the judgments we form is **framing** or the way in which choices are presented to us (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). If, for instance, a friend tells you the choice to go to Washington State University is ‘a great opportunity for you,’ you will view it in favorable terms. In contrast, if the friend says that ‘it’s not the worst school you could attend,’ you would likely have an unfavorable impression. Would you choose a sure gain of \$240 or a 25% chance to gain \$1,000/75% chance to gain nothing? 84% percent chose the first choice. Or what if you had an 80% chance to win \$45 or a 10% chance to gain \$30? In this case 78% went with the sure thing. One final example is useful. “Imagine that you have decided to see a play where admission is \$10 per ticket. As you enter the theater you discover that you have lost a \$10 bill. Would you still pay \$10 for a ticket for the play?” If you said yes, you are like the 88% of participants who did so too. But what if you paid \$10 to see the play but as you entered the theater you realized

that you lost your ticket. You never made note of the seat and the ticket cannot be recovered. Would you pay another \$10 for a ticket? Fifty-four percent said no while 46% said yes. On which side did you fall? (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981)

**4.1.5.2. Affective forecasting.** As we have seen throughout this module, emotions play a large role in how we make decisions and interpret the world around us. It should be no surprise that they also affect the decisions we make about our future, called **affective forecasting**. Buehler and McFarland (2001) asked students to predict their affective reactions to a wide variety of positive and negative future events. The results of five studies confirmed that participants anticipated more intense reactions to these events than what was experienced. They also found that participants anticipated stronger reactions when they focused narrowly on the upcoming event and neglected to consider past experiences and less intense reactions that they have had. **Emotional intelligence** or **EI** is our ability to manage the emotions of others as well as ourselves and includes skills such as empathy, emotional awareness, managing emotions, and self-control. We might expect that individuals high in EI would be better at affective forecasting than those low in EI. Research confirms this hypothesis (Dunn et al., 2007).

**4.1.5.3. How accurate are our judgments?** When it comes to the accuracy of our judgments, we have a tendency to overestimate just how good we are, called the **overconfidence phenomenon**. Doctors are not immune from this error in thinking. One study found that physicians were highly confident they made the correct choice in treating breast cancer though there was no consensus on what the best treatment would be across physicians (Baumann, Deber, & Thompson, 1991). According to Moore and Healy (2008) overconfidence takes three forms. First, is the *overestimation* of our ability, performance, chance of success, or level of control. A student believing he earned an A on an exam when in reality he earned a C is an example.

Second, people tend to believe they are better than others which the authors call *overplacement*. If that same student believed he had the highest grade in the class when in reality most of the class scored above him, he would be committing overplacement. Finally, *overprecision* occurs when we are excessively certain about the accuracy of our beliefs. The authors assert that these sources of overconfidence are presumed to have the same underlying psychological causes, when in fact they do not.

## 4.2. Attribution Theory

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define attribution theory.
- Describe the two types of attributions we might make.
- Explain the correspondent inference theory.
- Explain the covariation theory.
- List and describe types of cognitive errors we make in relation to explaining behavior.

### 4.2.1. Defining Terms

Have you ever wondered why the person driving down the road is swerving in and out of traffic, why your roommate doesn't clean up behind him or herself, why your kids choose to play video games over studying for the SAT, or why your boss seems to hate you? If so, you are trying to explain the behavior of others and is a common interest many students have in pursuing psychology as a major and career. Simply, it comes down to the question of *why*. According to **attribution theory** (Heider, 1958), people are motivated to explain their own and other people's behavior by attributing causes of that behavior to either something in themselves or a trait they

have, called a **dispositional attribution**, or to something outside the person called a **situational attribution**.

#### 4.2.2. Correspondent Inference Theory

The **correspondent inference theory** (Jones & Davis, 1965) provides one way to determine if a person's behavior is due to dispositional or situational factors and involves examining the context in which the behavior occurs. First, we seek to understand if the person made the behavior of their own volition or if it was brought on by the situation. If the behavior was freely chosen, then we use it as evidence of the person's underlying traits. For example, President Trump has proven to be a controversial figure in the United States and the reader of an article showcasing his successes in the first two years should be careful not to assume that the reporter supports him. Likewise, if the article was critical of his performance this does not mean that the reporter is against him. Either reporter may have been tasked with writing the article by their editor, meaning that the information presented was situationally driven and not necessarily reflective of the reporter's personal beliefs (i.e. not dispositional).

Second, we need to consider the outcome produced by the person's behavior. If several outcomes have been produced it will be hard to discern the motive of the individual. If only one outcome resulted from the behavior, then we can determine a motive with greater confidence.

Third, we need to examine whether the behavior was socially desirable or undesirable. If the former, we cannot confidently determine the motive for the behavior meaning that the positive behavior may not really result from their unique traits. If the behavior is undesirable, then we can assert that a dispositional attribution is the cause. Consider a first date. If the person seems extra nice, accommodating of your desires, funny, and/or smiles a lot, we cannot really

say it is because this is the type of person they are. It may simply be they are trying to present themselves in the best light to make a good first impression. If, on the other hand, the person seems very shy or egotistical, we will attribute this behavior to be representative of the type of person they are.

Fourth, what if you go into your local cell phone dealer because of a problem with your phone. If the technician is extremely nice, can we say this reflects the type of person they are, or is it due to the position they are in? Jones and Davis (1965) therefore says we need to consider if a social role is at work and in the case of our technician, their niceness may be due to their customer service-oriented job (situational) and not being high in the personality trait of agreeableness (dispositional).

#### 4.2.3. Covariation Theory

Kelley (1967; 1973) proposed his **covariation theory** which says that something can only be the cause of a behavior if it is present when the behavior occurs but absent when it does not occur and that we rely on three kinds of information about behavior: distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency. For this discussion let's use the example of a professor who requests that you stay after class (i.e. you want to know why they asked you to stay). First, *distinctiveness* asks whether the behavior is distinct or unique. In the case of this example, we would ask whether this professor usually asks students to stay after class. If they do ask students to stay (low distinctiveness), you will think they have personal reasons for talking with you. If they do not (high distinctiveness), you will see it as unusual and figure it has something to do with you and not them (i.e. they asked you to stay for situational reasons).

Second, *consensus* asks whether there is agreement or whether other instructors ask you to stay and talk to them after class. If yes (high consensus), the request is probably due to some external factor such as the professors being on your honors thesis committee and are inquiring about your progress (situational). If other professors do not ask you to stay after class (low consensus), the request is probably due to an internal motive or concern in your instructor (dispositional).

Finally, *consistency* asks whether the behavior occurs at a regular rate or frequency. In the case of our example, you will ask yourself whether that professor regularly asks you to stay. If yes (high consistency), you will think it is like the times before and think nothing of it (dispositional). If no (low consistency), you will think they requested the conference due to something you said or did in class (situational).

Kelly (1987) also proposed the **discounting principle** which states that when more than one cause is possible for a person's behavior, we will be less likely to assign any cause. For example, if a coworker is extra nice to the boss and offers them a ride home, we might make a dispositional attribution, unless we also know that this coworker is up for a raise or promotion. In the case of the latter, no attribution may be made because the person could be acting nice as usual or simply looking to influence the boss and get the desired advancement.

#### 4.2.4. Cognitive Errors When Explaining Behavior

The theories presented up to this point to explain how we assign a cause to behavior make it seem like we undergo a cognitively rigorous and logical process to make the determination. Though this may be true in some circumstances, most situations occur so quickly

that we really do not have the time to commit. As such, we take mental shortcuts, called **heuristics**, which could lead to accurate determinations but also incorrect ones.

**4.2.4.1. Fundamental attribution error.** First, we might make the **fundamental attribution error** (FAE; Jones & Harris, 1967) which is an error in assigning a cause to another's behavior in which we automatically assume a dispositional reason for their actions and ignore situational factors. In other words, we assume the person who cut us off is an idiot (dispositional) and do not consider that maybe someone in the car is severely injured and this person is rushing them to the hospital (situational).

Hooper et al. (2015) wanted to know if *perspective taking* (PT; Parker & Axtell, 2001), or when we adopt another person's point of view, could be used to reduce the FAE. Using a sample of 80 individuals from the general public with a mean age of 25.23 years, participants were divided up into one of four groups – one which completed PT training and watched a video in favor of capital punishment; a second which completed PT training and watched a video against capital punishment; a third which received no training and watched a video for capital punishment; and finally a group which received no training and watched a video against capital punishment. Results showed that both control groups (those receiving no PT training) committed the FAE at a higher rate than those with PT training. The authors note that even just a brief perspective taking intervention could improve everyday interactions in which the FAE is committed.

**4.2.4.2. Self-serving bias.** When we attribute our success to our own efforts (dispositional) and our failures to outside causes (situational), we are displaying the **self-serving bias**. Please refer back to Section 3.4.1. for a discussion of it.



**4.2.4.3. Belief in a just world.** Do people get what they deserve? The **belief in a just world (BJW) hypothesis** (Lerner, 1980) states that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. A study examining 458 German and Indian high school student's BJW and their bullying behavior was conducted and considered the mediational role of teacher justice. Analyses showed that the stronger the belief in BJW the more students saw their teacher's behavior toward them to be just and the less bullying they reported. The results held when sex, country and neuroticism were controlled for (Donat et al., 2012). Cross cultural differences have also been found in a general BJW (GBJW) and a personal BJW (PBJW) such that Chinese adults and adolescents, adolescents in a poverty stricken area, and adults surviving high exposure to post-earthquake trauma endorsed a GBJW which then predicted psychological resilience in the three samples, all of which contrasts with individualistic cultures that endorse PBJW (Wu et al., 2010). Another study (Stromwall, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2012) found that victims of rape were attributed higher levels of blame when the participant was high on BJW, and more so when the perpetrator was known to the victim.

**4.2.4.4. Actor-observer bias.** Fourth, the **actor-observer bias** occurs when the actor overestimates the influence of the situation on their own behavior while the observer overestimates the importance of the actor's personality traits on the actor's behavior (dispositional; Jones & Nisbett, 1972). An example might be a professor (observer) deeming that a student did not do well because they were lazy and did not study (i.e. dispositional) while the student (the actor) feels that their lack of success on an exam was due to the professor making an incredibly hard exam (i.e. situational).

**4.2.4.5. Availability heuristic.** What if we were to ask you are there are more words in the English language that *begin with* the letter r or are there more words with r as the *third letter*.

What would your answer be? If you are like the 152 participants in Tversky and Kahneman's (1973) study, you would likely say the first position. In fact, 105 participants did while 47 said the third position. The researchers called this the **availability heuristic** or our tendency to estimate how likely an event is to occur based on how easily we can produce instances of it in our mind. It is easier to think of words beginning with r than it is to think of words with r as the third letter, even though the latter is more likely in the English language. An interesting study of Facebook users (Chou & Edge, 2012) proposed that those with deeper involvement with Facebook would have different perceptions of others because they tend to base judgments on easily recalled examples (the availability heuristic) and they attribute positive content presented on the social networking site to the person's personality rather than situational factors (FAE). Results showed that those who used Facebook longer agreed more that others were happier than they were and agreed less that life is fair, while those using it more each week (in terms of number of hours) agreed more that others were happier and had better lives. The authors say that, "looking at happy pictures of others on Facebook gives people an impression that others are "always" happy and having good lives, as evident from these pictures of happy moments" (pg. 119) but they fail to pay attention to the circumstances that affect these people's behavior.

**4.2.4.6. Counterfactual thinking.** Have you ever wondered what your life might have been like if you went into the military instead of going to college? Or what if you did not ask your significant other out on a first date? Or if you had said no instead of yes (or vice versa) to whatever situation you can imagine? These "what might have been" situations we imagine are called **counterfactual thinking** and according to Summerville and Roese (2008) they are an essential feature of healthy cognitive and social functioning. They can lead to feelings of regret or envy if we compare the life we have now to a better one (Coricelli & Rustichini, 2010) or

relief if we realize that our current life could be worse; respectively making an upward comparison for the former and a downward comparison for the latter). Kray et al. (2010) further assert and demonstrate across four experiments that counterfactual thinking can facilitate the construction of meaning. For instance, in one experiment they found that participants who were asked to consider counterfactual alternatives to why they decided to attend Northwestern said their choice was more meaningful and significant compared to those in the control condition. The same was true when participants were asked to consider counterfactual alternatives to meeting a close friend and deciding on the importance of a turning point in their life (i.e. was it a product of fate?). In the case of the turning point, the authors write, “Rather than leading one to conclude that life could have easily unfolded differently, it appears that the fact of mentally undoing a turning point enhanced the perception that fate drove its occurrence” (pg. 110).

**4.2.4.7. Wishful seeing.** Do you think people tend to see what they want to see? Research suggests they do (Dunning & Balci, 2013). Across five experiments, Balci and Dunning (2010) provide empirical support for what is called **wishful seeing**. In the first experiment, they asked participants to measure how far away (in inches) a water bottle was from their current position after feeding one group pretzels that made up 40% of their daily intake of sodium (thirsty condition) and allowing another group to drink as much water as they wanted to from four, 8-oz glasses (quenched condition). Participants also indicated how long it had been since they last consumed a beverage, rated on a 7-point scale how thirsty they were, and finally rated on the same scale how appealing a bottle of water was. The two groups did not differ significantly in terms of how long it had been since they drank and those who ate pretzels reported greater levels of thirst. Thirsty participants rated the bottle of water as more appealing and perceived the water bottle as closer than quenched participants. In a second experiment, 123

students of Ohio University reported a \$100 bill as closer if they had a chance of winning it compared to a group that had no chance of winning it. The researchers also found that students randomly assigned to a condition receiving positive feedback about their sense of humor estimated their personality test clipped to a stand 72 in. away was closer than groups receiving negative feedback. A third experiment showed that participants (40 students completing the study for course credit) underthrew a bean bag when a gift card was valued at \$25 then when it had no value, indicating that they believed the gift card was closer than it really was when the value was higher. In all experiments, Balci and Dunning (2010) found that perceptions of distance depend at least in part on how desirable the perceived object was. When we perceive desirable objects as closer, we can engage in motivated behavior to obtain these objects.

**4.2.4.8. False uniqueness and consensus.** It should also be pointed out that the false uniqueness and false consensus effects discussed in Module 3 relate here as well. Please see Section 3.4.2. for a discussion.

## **Module Recap**

That's it. In Module 4 we discussed how we perceive the world around us, called person perception, and using social cognition. This involves collecting information via the senses and then adding meaning to this raw sensory social information. We add meaning by assigning people to categories for which we have schemas. We then form judgments, but they can be inaccurate at times. We also try and understand a person's behavior by attributing the cause to dispositional or situational factors. With self and person perception now covered, we move to Module 5 and a discussion of attitudes.

## Part II. How We Think About Ourselves and Others

### Module 5: Attitudes

## **Module 5: Attitudes**

### **Module Overview**

An important part of how we think about ourselves and others comes from our knowledge of how we view the world. This view, as we have seen from previous modules, is shaped by our self-knowledge and the ways we think and perceive, which we saw are often filled with errors and biases. In this module, we turn our attention to our attitudes. They are the final piece to understanding how we think about ourselves and others. This module will focus on what they are, why they are important - focusing on the predictive nature of attitudes and finally how our behavior can impact our attitudes.

### **Module Outline**

- 5.1. What is an Attitude?
- 5.2. Why are Attitudes Important?
- 5.3. How does our Behavior Impact our Attitudes?

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Describe an attitude.
- Explain why attitudes are important.
- Introduce behavior prediction models.
- Explain how our behavior impacts our attitudes.

## 5.1. What is an Attitude?

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define attitude.
- Examine the structure and function of an attitude.
- Investigate the origins of attitudes.

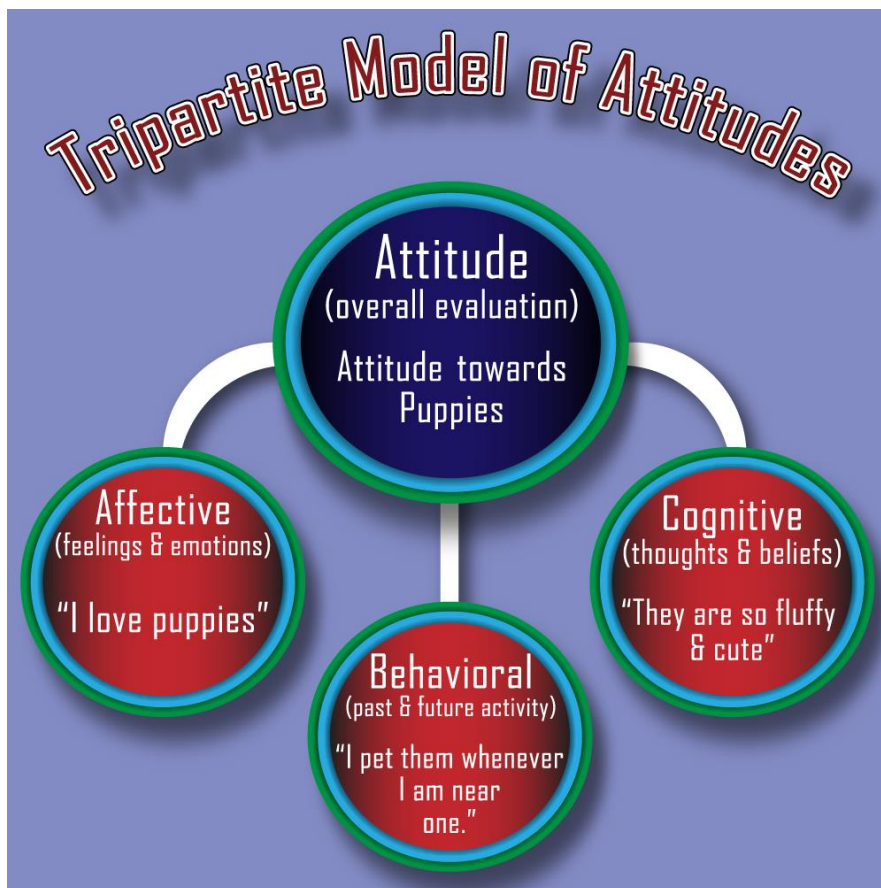
First, an **attitude** is our assessment of ourselves, other people, ideas, and objects in our world (Petty et al., 1997) Ask yourself, what do you think about Jenny in your social psychology course, your discussion board question that is due this week, or puppies and ice cream? Your responses to these questions are your attitudes toward them. You might respond with “Jenny is really nice and always helps her classmates” or “I hated the discussion board question because it was really boring”. For most people, their attitude responses toward puppies and ice cream would be positive. We will see in this section that attitudes are a bit more complex than these examples suggest.

### 5.1.1. Structure and Function of an Attitude

The first way we can examine attitudes is through a “tripartite” model. It is often referred to as the **ABC’s of attitudes** and consists of three bases or components, *affect*, *behavior*, and *cognition*. Originally, researchers believed that everyone’s attitudes contained all three bases, but we now know that some attitudes do not contain all three, and some are even inconsistent with each other (Rosenberg et al., 1960; Miller & Tesser, 1986b). Let’s more closely examine what this means. When we express *affect*, we are sharing our feelings or emotions about the person, idea, or object. In the examples above, when we love or hate those are clearly our feelings about the attitude object. We can see the *cognitive* component as well. This involves our thoughts about the attitude object, they often look like opinions or facts that we hold. So, when we think Jenny is nice and always helps her classmates or the discussion board question is boring, these are the facts as we see it about the attitude object. The examples above do not contain a behavioral component. This would be actions that result from these thoughts and/or feelings. So, we could add that you might befriend Jenny, not put as much effort into your discussion board response, buy ice cream, and pet puppies.



Figure 5.1. Tripartite Model of Attitudes



### For Further Consideration

Take a minute and think of some attitudes you hold. Write them down on a sheet of paper. You can use them throughout the module. Let's start with the first couple you wrote down. Try to break them down into the ABC's of attitudes. Start with affect (what are your feelings about the attitude you hold), cognition (thoughts about the attitude you hold), and behavior (actions you take because of the attitude).

In the above examples and the ones you practiced, you were assuming that the attitude contained all three bases. Again, we know that some attitudes are only made of one or two bases

and we also know that they can be inconsistent (Millar & Tesser, 1992). An example might help us to understand - you might only have thoughts and feelings about puppies. You don't have any actions connected to it. These thoughts and feelings might not line up. You might love puppies, but your thoughts are connected to how allergic you are to them and how much hair they shed, which will make your allergies worse. So, this can be a challenge for us later when we are trying to predict how you will behave around puppies. You love them, but you cannot be around them since they make you sick. Will you pet the puppy anyway? Will your affect base be stronger than your cognitive base? We need to know which one is more important, stronger or more powerful to predict your behavior (Rosenberg et al., 1960; Millar & Tesser, 1986b).

Functional theorists Katz (2008) and Smith, Bruner, & White (1956) addressed the issue of not knowing which base (affective, cognition or behavior) was most important by looking at how the person's attitude serves them psychologically. They came up with four different functions that an attitude might serve. One of the most beneficial things an attitude can do for us is to make our lives more efficient. We do not have to evaluate and process each thing we come into contact with to know if it is good (safe) or bad (threatening; Petty, 1995). This is called the *knowledge function*, and it allows us to understand and make sense of the world. My attitude towards insects is somewhat negative. I tend to have large reactions to bites from them and although most do not bite, my immediate reaction is to avoid them if at all possible. In this way my attitude keeps me from having to evaluate every type of insect I come into contact with. Saving time and allowing me to think of other things in life (Bargh, et al., 1992). This example might have prompted you to think that this generalization could lead to discrimination, and you would be correct. In an attempt to be more efficient, I am not stopping and processing every

insect I come into contact with and some insects are good (safe). We will discuss how this helps explain prejudice and discrimination in a later module.

The other three functions serve specific psychological needs on top of providing us with knowledge that allows us to make sense of our world. Our attitudes can serve an *ego-defensive function* which is to help us cover up things that we do not like about ourselves or help us to feel better about ourselves. You might think cheerleaders are stupid or superficial to protect yourself from feeling badly that you aren't a cheerleader. Here you defended against a threatening truth - you aren't a cheerleader, which you want to be, and you boosted your self-image by believing that you are better than them - you are smart and complex. We can categorize some of our attitudes as tools that lead us to greater rewards or help us to avoid punishments. So, women might have developed an attitude that having sex with many partners is bad. This has both a knowledge function and a *utilitarian function* by helping women avoid the societal punishment of being called a slut and then seeking the reward of being the kind of girl that someone would take home and introduce to their parents. The final function centers around the idea that some of our attitudes help us express who we are to other people, *value-expressive function*. We see this a lot on social media. If you were to examine someone's Facebook or Instagram page you would see that their posts are full of their attitudes about life and they intentionally post certain things so that people will know who they are as a person. You might post a lot of political things and people might see you as a politically engaged person, you might post a lot about the environment and people see that you are passionate about this topic. This is who you are.

**For Further Consideration**

Look at the attitudes you listed earlier. Can you identify what function they serve in your life? Most attitudes serve the knowledge function, but are they also serving the ego-defensive or the utilitarian or the value-expressive functions? Pick out an example for each one. Do you have social media? What does it say about who you are? How does it meet the value-expressive function of attitudes?

Understanding the structure and function of attitudes can be useful for us but it is also important to know how they form or why some seem to be more powerful in guiding our behavior. Often, attitudes are formed from our own unique life experiences. This is why you will find that people's attitudes and the strength of those attitudes vary so widely. As students in this course you will often find people have strong attitudes about certain topics. You might be surprised when they hold an attitude that is so different from yours and wonder how that is possible. We all have unique experiences that will shape our attitudes, opinions, and ideas about the world. So, when someone expresses an attitude that is different from your own it is most likely they had an experience in their own life that shaped that attitude (Fazio & Zanna, 1978). It is also possible to form an attitude indirectly from other's experiences. For example, children develop many of their initial attitudes by observing caregivers and sibling's reactions to their world. If your Mom or Dad is afraid of spiders or insects, then often children will develop an attitude of dislike and fear. Research finds that when attitudes are formed from direct experiences in life, as with the above example of being bitten by a spider and having a bad reaction, rather than indirectly where your parents are scared of spiders, there is a stronger attitude and a resulting stronger connection to someone's behavior. What this means is we will

be able to better predict your behavior toward a spider with direct experience formation over indirect experience formation.

Why do you think that attitudes formed from direct experience have greater predictive power on behavior? Well, recall what you learned in the module on the self. You might remember our discussion of the *self-reference effect*. We know that anything that is connected to us will be easier to remember and come to mind more quickly. So, it makes sense that if it happened directly to us it comes to mind quicker than attitudes that come from things that we heard about or saw someone else experience. If we follow this line of thinking, then indirect attitudes that came from people connected to us vs. strangers we read about online, should be stronger. The associations that are closest to us will result in the strongest attitude formation. (Anderson, 1993).

## **5.2. Why Are Attitudes Important?**

### Section Learning Objectives

- Explore how attitudes influence social thought.
- Examine factors that influence an attitude's predictability of corresponding behavior.

### **5.2.1. Attitudes Influence Social Thought**

We research value attitudes because we believe that they strongly influence social thought and can predict what someone will do. We as humans like for our worlds to be

predictable. We want to believe that knowing how someone thinks and feels about something will give us insight into how they process the information they take in, as well as what they do with it. We have seen with previous modules how the way we think influences behavior, and we know attitudes color how we perceive all the information that is funneled in our direction.

In the previous module we focused on how our beliefs can alter our behavior and other people's behavior. For example, with the self-fulfilling prophecy, our judgment of another person can alter our behavior towards them, thereby influencing them to respond to our behavior by acting in a way that supports our initial judgment and fulfills their prophecy. Our attitudes are often used to guide our behavior (Bargh, et al.,1992).

### **5.2.2. Attitudes Can Be Predictive of Behavior**

Let's start with an example. Do you think it is important to be honest? Most people say yes. They do not want to be perceived as a liar. We need to be trusted in order to have successful interactions and relationships. Your strong attitude toward honesty should allow me to predict that you will tell the truth. Would I be accurate in my prediction? The answer is no. Some of you might already be thinking of situations when the most socially acceptable response is to lie. What if you are at a wedding and the bride asks you how the cake tastes? It tastes terrible. Will you tell her the truth? The norms (unwritten rules or expectations) of this situation are to make sure the bride has a great day, so most of us would lie to protect her feelings. This illustrates a great example of an attitude not being predictive of someone's behavior. Let's examine when and how someone's attitude might be more or less predictive of their behavior.

**5.2.2.1. Aspects of the situation - Situational constraints.** Let's first look at the situation. Like in our honesty example, it seems that there are some moments where our attitude cannot be expressed in our behavior. When there are situational constraints that come from **social norms**, or unwritten rules that guide our behavior, we find that people might not behave according to their true attitude. You might have an attitude that dressing comfortably is more important than how you look. There are a lot of situations that might keep you from expressing this attitude. Often, we have to wear certain types of clothes to work, church or other events.

**5.2.2.2. Aspects of the situation - Time pressure.** Time pressure is another aspect of the situation that impacts how predictive an attitude will be. In this case, it will strengthen the attitude-behavior connection. We know that under time pressure, when we are in a hurry, we use attitudes as a way to save on our cognitive resources. We do not have to process the situation which takes time. We can just use the shortcut of our attitudes. In this way attitudes are operating much like heuristics which you learned about in the last module. They allow us to act with very little thought. This is why in this situation, our attitudes will vary and likely result in a behavior that fits our attitude.

**5.2.2.3. Aspects of the Attitude - Attitude strength.** It isn't just the situation that can impact the attitude-behavior connection. There are also aspects of the attitude itself that can strengthen the connection. The stronger the attitude the more likely we can predict someone's behavior from their attitude. A *strong attitude* is one that has the power to impact our thoughts and behavior and is resistant to change and stable over time. The research on strong attitudes often finds quite a few strength-related attitude attributes. We are going to focus on a few of them: attitude importance, knowledge, accessibility, and intensity (Petty & Krosnick, 1995).

We have already learned that an attitude will be stronger when it comes from our direct experiences and if we are closer to these strength-related attitude attributes, we can see how they contribute to attitude strength. Strong attitudes are *important* to us or psychologically significant and the more important an attitude is, the stronger it will be (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). So, you can ask yourself questions like, “How personally affected am I by this attitude object? How much do I care about it?”. Can you think of something that means a lot to you? I care a lot about the issues that impact women. I grew up in a highly gender stereotyped household and that direct experience impacted me and made it important to me. I now feel strongly about equality between the genders.

As we learn more about our attitude it will grow stronger. *Knowledge* of that attitude is the second factor. This is all the information we have about the attitude object (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). To continue the example, I spend a lot of time reading books on feminism, study gender equality, teach about gender and become more knowledgeable about equality.

If you remember from Module 3, the self-reference effect indicates that something connected to us will be remembered easier and more quickly. This is important to the third factor that increases strength, *accessibility*. We know an attitude is strong when it comes to our mind more often and more quickly (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). We measure this by timing how long it takes you to think about an attitude in relation to an attitude object.



*Most people have a strong reaction to the following picture:*



This strong reaction is a good example of *attitude intensity* or the strength of the emotional reaction that is elicited from the attitude object. In this case, maggots tend to elicit a strong reaction of disgust. Strong attitudes aren't just better at predicting behavior. They are also less likely to change over time. This will be important to us in the next module on persuasion.

**5.2.2.4. Aspects of the attitude - Attitude specificity.** Another way that we can increase the chances that an attitude will lead to a consistent behavior is to make sure that the attitude is more specific than general. For example, if I want to predict if you will attend church every Sunday (more specific), I can't ask you how you feel about religion (more general). I need to ask your attitude about attending church every Sunday. You will notice that they are at the same level of specificity or are more specific than general. Typically, the more specific the attitude the better it will be at predicting the specific behavior.

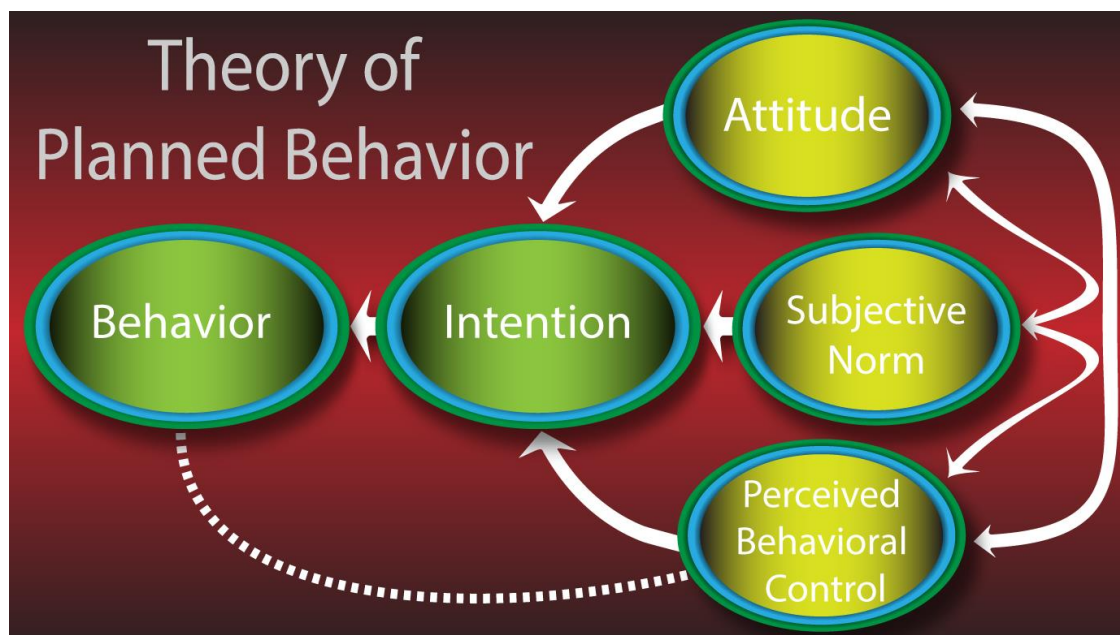
**For Further Consideration**

If you wanted to know if people were planning to vote for a specific candidate in the current election, what attitude would you need to know about them to predict who they would vote for?

**5.2.2.5. Behavior prediction models.** The important distinction between general attitudes and behavior-specific ones is that behavior-specific ones allow us to better predict behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced a model that would allow us, through someone's evaluation of behavior (attitudes) and thoughts on whether other important people would do the behavior (subjective norms), to predict their intention to do behavior and then that intention would predict whether they actually end up making the behavior. For example, one study looked at whether people would cheat on their significant other (Drake & McCabe, 2000). First, we need to know their evaluation, positive or negative, toward cheating on their significant other. Then we need to know if important others in their life would cheat on their significant other. Both pieces of information determine their intention to cheat on a significant other. If they intend to cheat then we will expect to see when we look at their behavior that they will cheat on their significant other. This is the **theory of reasoned action**. Later Ajzen separated from Fishbein believing that another critical component was part of the model and missing from the original theory. This model became the **theory of planned behavior** and added perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2012). This component is much like self-efficacy discussed in a previous module and deals with your confidence in being able to engage in the behavior. So, if you look at our cheating example, Ajzen believed that you could meet all the conditions above intending to

cheat, but still not cheat. He said that if you do not believe you can cheat because you do not have the opportunity (place to cheat, person to cheat with, do not think you can get away with it) that you will not cheat. This an example of perceived behavioral control.

*Figure 5.2 Theory of Planned Behavior*



### 5.3. How Does our Behavior Impact our Attitudes?

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Define self-perception theory.
- Define cognitive dissonance.

#### 5.3.1. Our Behavior Can Make Us Aware of Our Attitudes

One way that our behavior impacts our attitudes is when it helps us to understand what we are feeling. Often throughout the day we will have moments of uncertainty or ambiguity about our evaluation of an object, person, or issue. We will look to our actions to determine what it is we are feeling, called **self-perception theory**. All of this happens outside of our awareness. It is only through discussing it in a psychology course that you might introspectively examine the process and realize that an uncertainty about your feelings or attitude about your favorite music can be cleared up by looking at your music library and realizing that both rap and alternative are equally your favorite. Most often though we are not actively engaged in introspection and this process occurs outside of our awareness through an automatic processing of facial expressions, body posture, and behaviors (Laird & Bresler, 1992).

One of my favorite studies in psychology because of the ingenious methodology helps exemplify this idea. Researchers had one group of participants place a pen in their lips, which would inhibit a smile, and another group of participants were asked to put a pen in their teeth, which would facilitate a smile. Both groups then watched a funny segment of a cartoon. The

researchers predicted and found that participants in the teeth condition evaluated the cartoon as funnier than the participants who placed the pen in their lips. The thinking behind this is that a pen in your teeth makes the muscles around your mouth move into a smile and we should interpret our feelings as positive based on this facial expression (Strack, et al, 1988). In recent years, researchers have done variations of this experiment with rubber bands and other interesting methodologies and found similar results (Mori & Mori, 2009).

### 5.3.2 Our Behavior Can Conflict with our Attitudes

Sometimes as we move through our lives, we will realize that some behaviors we are engaging in do not fit with one of our attitudes or we will have two attitudes that we realize seem to contradict each other. This inconsistency or conflict results in an unpleasant feeling that we want to immediately get rid of or reduce, called **cognitive dissonance**. It is another instance of how a behavior impacts our attitudes and, in this case, could change it. An example of this would be if you toss a can or newspaper in the trash and you hold the attitude that recycling is important to saving the planet. You will probably immediately feel like you are a hypocrite, especially if someone else points it out. It is important to us to get rid of this feeling as quickly as possible.

We will do this in one of three ways and choose the one that requires the least effort. We can *change our attitude or behavior*. I can take the can out of the trash. This is probably the option that requires the least effort. The next option for reducing dissonance is to *seek out new information* that supports our attitude or behavior. A popular example here is that smokers who feel dissonance from their behavior and the research on smoking dangers will seek out

information that this research is inconclusive or minimal. In our example, we might recall a recent article we read outlining the recycling of one person and showing that it does not change the overall picture of climate change. We leave the can and reduce our dissonance. The last option is called *trivialization*. This is where we make the attitude less important. We might decide that recycling isn't as important to us and that it isn't changing the world. However, something like reducing our plastic consumption is an important attitude to replace the dissonant one (Petty, 1995).

Can you think of the last time you felt this unpleasant feeling from conflicting attitudes or an attitude and behavior? This process often occurs outside of our awareness. It is again only in a psychology course and through the introspection process where we would consider situations with these inconsistencies and then try to remember how we reduced them. A popular classroom demonstration to help students experience cognitive dissonance has students report how they feel about things like helping the homeless, eating a certain number of fruits and vegetables, voting in elections, and exercising regularly. As you can imagine most people have favorable attitudes toward these behaviors. They are then asked whether they have engaged in these activities recently or in the last year. Most answer no and experience cognitive dissonance. Can you imagine yourself in this situation? Which reduction technique would you use? I imagine that for most students the easiest one is trivialization and they might say, 'This is just a dumb activity that teacher is doing.' However it is possible that some students went on to exercise more or volunteer at the homeless shelter or sought out information that you can still be healthy, a good person, or civically engaged without doing those four types of behaviors.

**Module Recap**

This module covered attitudes, what they are, their structure and function, where they come from, their importance in their predictive nature, and how our behavior can influence them. Our evaluations of the world around us play a powerful role in shaping our world and guiding us through it. It isn't surprising that attitudes are one of the most popular topics in social psychology. We ended this module by talking about cognitive dissonance and found that it has the potential to lead to attitude change. As we move into the next part of the text on influence, we will start with a module on persuasion. This module will build on our knowledge of attitudes and exemplify how persuasive communication can also lead to attitude change.

## Part III. How We Influence and Are Influenced by Others



## Part III. How We Influence and Are Influenced by Others

### Module 6:

### Persuasion

## **Module 6: Persuasion**

### **Module Overview**

The second section of the textbook covered the three main ways we better understand ourselves and others. That knowledge gives us a solid base that helps us navigate our world. The next section will look at how we influence and are influenced by others. Everything we have already learned will continue to be built upon as we now come to understand persuasion, conformity and group influence. In the last module on attitudes, we learned that our evaluation of things, or our attitudes, can be changed, sometimes by our own inconsistencies, but often through persuasive communication attempts. This module will focus on those persuasive communication attempts as well as our attempts to persuade others. We will focus on how we process these attempts, when they are most successful, and how we can resist them.

### **Module Outline**

- 6.1. Processing Persuasive Communication
- 6.2. Factors that Lead to Successful Persuasion
- 6.3. A Closer Look at Cults: Dangers and Resistance to Persuasion

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Explore the idea that we have a persuasion schema or bag of tricks for persuading and being persuaded by others
- Explain how we process persuasive attempts through the dual processing models

- Investigate what characteristics make a communicator more or less persuasive, specifically focusing on credibility and attractiveness
- Explore types of messages that successfully persuade
- Clarify the danger of cults and how we can resist being persuaded by them

## 6.1. Processing Persuasive Communication

### Section Learning Objectives

- Explore the persuasive schema perspective.
- Describe the dual processing models.

#### 6.1.1. Persuasion Schema

We spend our days persuading and being persuaded. You may have just emailed your teacher asking for an extension or tried to get your child to eat their lunch. You might also have had two ads pop up while you were on Facebook: one is for this amazing new bra and another one is for a blanket for your daughter that looks like a mermaid tail. **Persuasion** serves an important function in a social society. If you are not successful in persuading others, you could miss out on job opportunities or have poor relationships or no relationships. If you are unaware of persuasion attempts, then you could be taken advantage of.

### **For Further Consideration**

Take a moment and think about who tries to persuade you on a daily basis and whom do you try to persuade. Make a list of these people. What kinds of things do people persuade other people (their friends, their family, or their enemies) to do? What are the different techniques people use to get these people to do what they want?

A research study done by Rule, et al., (1985) set out to determine if we have a persuasion schema or package of behaviors (tricks) for how we persuade people and are persuaded by them. They completed three different studies to find these answers. In the first study, they asked participants to report whom they persuaded and who persuaded them. They found that students reported others were persuading them more than they were persuading other people. When asked how they persuaded others a list of 12 reasons/goals was generated. You can see this list in Table 6.1a. How do these responses match with your answers from above? Are they similar/different? In the second study they took this list of 12 reasons/goals for persuading and asked the participants to write all the ways that they could achieve these persuasion goals and then rank them by most likely to use. In Table 6.1b you will find the 15 different approaches. They found that it didn't matter who was persuading or being persuaded. There seems to be a standard order of persuasive strategies. How do your responses fit with the second table? Do your answers fit the research findings?

Table 6.1 A

## 12 Goals for Persuasion

Obtaining Information  
 Obtaining some object  
 Obtaining permission  
 Getting someone to do a favor  
 Changing someone's opinion  
 Getting someone to engage in some activity  
 Buying or selling something  
 Changing an existing relationship  
 Changing someone's personal habit  
 Helping the persuader  
 Helping a third party  
 Getting someone to do something against self-interest

Table 6.1 B

## 15 Approaches to Reach Persuasion Goals

### Asking

No reason for the request is given.

### Invoking Personal Expertise

Because the persuader is an expert, you should adopt their attitude.

### Invoking Personal Need

That is, the persuader's need.

### Buttering Up

The persuader makes the person feel wonderful or important.

### Invoking Role Relationships

"You're not a true friend unless you do this for me".

### Bargaining For the Favor

### Invoking A Norm

"Everybody's doing it".

### Invoking Moral Principle

"It's the right thing to do"

### Invoking Altruism

"I'm not asking for myself, it's for the people I will be able to help if you grant the request"

### Offering A Bribe

A rebate for the purchase.

### Emotional Appeals

The persuader sulks hoping the target will feel guilty.

### Personal Criticism

"You're lazy, you never want to do anything"

### Deception

Tricking the person into granting the request.

### Threat

### Physical Force

### 6.1.2 Dual-Processing Models and How We Process Persuasion

Our days are spent navigating the enormous amounts of information that are being sent our way. We get up in the morning and the radio DJ tells us about the latest news stories. We check our email and we have 13 new emails from co-workers, family, friends and in my case, students. Our social media is full of advertisements trying to sell us the latest products, and as we drive around town there are billboards advertising stores and the local college football team. Which of these pieces of information or persuasion attempts will be successful? Which ones will persuade us to do something, to buy something or to change our attitude about something? The first step in understanding persuasion is to examine how we process or think about these persuasive attempts.

It is impossible to spend a lot of time thinking about all the information that we are bombarded with — we would be driven mad or pushed to mental exhaustion. So, as motivated tacticians, Chaiken et al., (1989), says we will be very selective of the moments we use our limited cognitive resources. This small set of information that we select will be fully analyzed and investigated. Everything else we come into contact with will be responded to automatically. We won't spend much time thinking or considering, but rather automatically responding using our mental shortcuts or **heuristics** that are triggered from the context of the information. Is the person presenting the information attractive? We have a “**What is beautiful-is-good**” heuristic — this mental shortcut results in us automatically connecting the source's attractiveness with the qualities of being good, kind, smart, etc. For example, Ted Bundy, the serial killer, was considered attractive and would lure women to their deaths by asking for help. The women he asked were happy to help. They automatically responded to the “what is beautiful-is-good” heuristic, assuming he was kind and trustworthy and they went to help someone who would end

up killing them. Researchers Petty & Cacioppo (1986); Petty et al., (2009) and Chaiken, et al., (1989) found that these two ways of thinking best fit into a dual-processing model. We either follow the deep/thoughtful path, which the researchers call the **central route** or systematic processing, or we follow the superficial/automatic path, which the researchers called the **peripheral route** or heuristic processing.

The **central route to persuasion** will be followed or **systematic processing** will occur when we carefully consider the message content. In order to follow this path or use this processing we need to be motivated and able to think about the message. What motivates us? It is not surprising that we are pushed to think more deeply when *something is related to or about us*, also called *personal relevance* (Petty, 1995). For example, when I was a senior in high school, we were told that they might change the school day from hour-long periods to block scheduling. They gave presentations to the students and we were all going to be able to vote and give our perspective on the possible change. All students, including the seniors who this would not impact, were going to vote. Since it wasn't about me (not personally relevant), I didn't follow the central route, but my younger sister who was a freshman and would be impacted did. Because it was personally relevant to her and going to directly impact her, she paid attention to the messages we were being given. She wanted to know how this would impact her day and if it would improve her learning. The only way she would vote in favor of this change was if the message was strong and demonstrated that this new structure was the best choice for learning. I, on the other hand, wasn't going to be impacted by this change, so I did not waste my precious resources thinking about the message. We will see in a moment what my thinking did look like.

The other reason we will follow the central route of persuasion is if *we are able to think about it*. In order to be able to think about it, there needs to be limited distractions. We can't be

rushed or in a hurry, and we have to be able to understand the message being presented to us. It also helps if the message is repeated and written down (Petty, 1995). If a pharmaceutical company wants to persuade you to use their new drug, but their message is full of jargon and scientific information you can't follow, then you aren't likely to pay attention to the message or be persuaded to use the drug. So, in the example above, if the school board and employees pushing for the change want the students who find the issue personally relevant to get on board, they also need to give them time to process the message and they need to make sure that the message is something adolescents can understand. It would also help if they have an opportunity to see it more than once and can read the arguments at their pace. The situational determinants of being motivated and able are key to following the central route, but there is a dispositional determinant as well, the **need for cognition** (Haddock, et al., 2008). This concept deals with enjoyment from engaging in effortful cognitive activity. Individuals who score high on the need for cognition measure spend more time carefully processing the message, following the central route to persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982).

As noted earlier, it is adaptive for us to rely on heuristics and automatic processing of our world. It saves us time and our limited cognitive resources. For the majority of us, we mostly follow the **peripheral route or heuristic processing** (Petty, 1995). The context or situation that the message is delivered in is more important than the actual message. These context or situational cues trigger automatic responses and we quickly move forward in our lives. (Cialdini, 2008). Remember our example from earlier where my high school was proposing changes to our daily scheduling. I followed the peripheral route to persuasion. I am a busy senior who doesn't really have the time to think about the message, and since it isn't going to impact me, I really don't care to spend time carefully evaluating the message. So, how can they persuade me to vote



in favor of block scheduling? They need my automatic acceptance from situational cues. I would probably be persuaded by an authority or an expert on the topic, and if I am in a good mood, I will probably also go along with what is presented. In fact, this is what the school did. They brought in attractive and trustworthy experts, and they always had food and drinks during presentations. So, for those of us that weren't personally impacted, we were likely to automatically be persuaded by those situational cues. More examples can be found in Robert Cialdini's (2008) book, *Influence: Science and Practice*.

It is clear that we need to examine the persuasion situation more closely to understand exactly when our persuasive attempts will be most successful. Our motivations in persuasion will determine which path we want our audience to follow. If we want a more permanent attitude change, we will want the person or group we are attempting to persuade to follow the central route. If we just need them to go along right now or buy something once, then the peripheral route is a good choice. The next section will focus on the factors that lead to successful persuasion and how our processing route influences their effectiveness.

Figure 6.1. The Elaboration Likelihood Model



## 6.2. Factors that Lead to Successful Persuasion

### Section Learning Objectives

- Explain what type of person is most persuasive
- Clarify what aspects of the message make it persuasive

### 6.2.1. Persuasive Communicators

The first factor that can impact the success of the persuasion attempt is the person communicating or the source of the persuasion. There are different ways that a source will be presented to us. They can be obvious — we see them. It could be a celebrity advertising a product on a television commercial or it could be an average American selling a new cooking tool in a social media ad. However, sometimes during a persuasive attempt, the source isn't clear or obvious. They might be a narrator you can't see or a print ad without any visible source of the persuasion (Petty & Wegener, 1998). What makes someone a persuasive communicator? Are there certain qualities that will make someone more or less persuasive to the audience? Research has found that credibility and attractiveness are important in successful persuasion.

**6.2.1.1 Communicator/Source credibility.** Let's start with **credibility**. A review done by Pornpitakpan (2004) on studies from 1950-2004 found that using highly credible sources resulted in more persuasion. What makes someone credible? Perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness are key to credibility. *Perceived expertise* is defined as someone we perceive to be both knowledgeable on a topic and has the ability to share accurate information with us (Petty & Wegener, 1998). In situations where we have low personal relevance or ability to process the message, it serves as a peripheral cue. Expertise will trigger us to automatically go along with the

persuasive attempt because we believe that this person knows what they are talking about. Can you think of some examples? We often use heuristic processing while watching television. Let's say you're watching a toothpaste commercial. There is a dentist in a white lab coat discussing how effective a brand of toothpaste is. If you are persuaded in this instance, it is because of the cue of the dentist. You automatically think this is a good toothpaste because this expert told you it was.

*Perceived trustworthiness* is the other aspect of credibility we need to look at more closely. Research, not surprisingly, has found that when we do not feel like the person has anything to gain and that they are sincere, this is a strong indicator of persuasion. If people view someone as trustworthy, they will automatically be persuaded by the attempt. However, if the source is viewed as untrustworthy, even people who have a low need for cognition (don't want to think deeply all the time) will engage in a similar amount of message analysis as individuals who are high in need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Have you ever had the experience of shopping at a store where the employees are working on commission and only make money if they convince you to buy something? When I was growing up, I often shopped at a clothing store that used this model with their salespeople. When you went in, you were immediately approached and often they continued to interact with you while you shopped, hoping that you would buy something and they would get paid more. Their perceived trustworthiness dropped because it was in their best interest to persuade me to purchase something. So, when they told me that I looked great in that outfit, I was likely to be skeptical of their authenticity. I often avoided that store for that reason. Is there anything they could do to appear more trustworthy? It would benefit them to argue against their own self-interest. If they were to tell you that something you

tried on wasn't the right piece for you, that would actually make you more likely to be persuaded by them and buy the other clothes they recommended.

**6.2.1.2 Communicator/Source attractiveness.** Another characteristic that can help the persuasive attempts of a communicator is attractiveness. Attractiveness can include both physical attractiveness and likeability. As was mentioned earlier in the module, we hold a heuristic (mental shortcut) where we believe “what-is-beautiful-is-good”. Research has found that people associate talent, kindness, honesty and intelligence with beauty (Eagly, et al., 1991). These same studies have been done in a variety of contexts and individuals who are highly attractive are more likely to be voted for, hired for a job and granted leniency in the judicial system. When we aren't motivated and able to think deeply, we follow the peripheral route and this is when peripheral cues like appearance can have the greatest impact on persuasion.

### For Further Consideration

Can you think of ads or products that use really attractive communicators? For me, one example that comes to mind is the store Abercrombie and Fitch. Most of the time they have been in business, they have been known for their hiring practice of only employing physically attractive models who have a certain body type and sex appeal to sell their clothes. In 2015, they decided to change these discriminatory practices. It would be interesting to see if they are still as successful in selling clothes with their changes in advertising.

[HYPERLINK "https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/04/24/abercrombie-fitch-says-it-will-no-longer-hire-workers-based-on-body-type-or-physical-attractiveness/?utm\\_term=.dfa24fd68f27"](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/04/24/abercrombie-fitch-says-it-will-no-longer-hire-workers-based-on-body-type-or-physical-attractiveness/?utm_term=.dfa24fd68f27)  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/04/24/abercrombie-fitch-says-it-will-no-longer-hire-workers-based-on-body-type-or-physical-attractiveness/?utm\\_term=.dfa24fd68f27](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/04/24/abercrombie-fitch-says-it-will-no-longer-hire-workers-based-on-body-type-or-physical-attractiveness/?utm_term=.dfa24fd68f27)

What are your favorite celebrities currently advertising? Is it perfume, their own clothing line or something unexpected? Do you notice that just their association with the product makes you like it more? Had you considered their impact on your feelings toward the product?

Another powerful aspect of attractiveness is *likeability*. One of the things that can increase liking is similarity. We like people who are like us (Byrne, 1971). This includes sharing opinions, personality traits, background, lifestyle and even when people mirror our behavior, posture, and facial expressions (Cialdini, 2008). A classic example of the power of similarity comes from a study done in the 1970s with clothing style. During this time period young people wore primarily two types of dress, what is referred to as “hippie” or “straight” fashion. The study had confederates wear one of these types of clothing and then approach people who were wearing one of the two types of clothing and ask for a dime to make a phone call. The results support the fact that similarity has the power to persuade. When the confederate’s clothing

matched the person they asked, they were more likely to get a dime from them (Emswiller, Deaux, Willits, 1971).

### 6.2.2 Persuasive Messages

After assuring you have the appropriate communicator, the next step is to determine what types of **message content** will be the most effective. There are several questions we need to answer in order to completely understand the role of message content in persuasion. What is actually contained in the successful message? Is it full of logical arguments and evidence or is it presented to elicit certain feelings? Two emotions often used to persuade are pleasant feelings and fear. Another question we need to answer is: will the way the message is presented make it more or less persuasive? We will also have to decide how to present our perspective. Do we just present our side or do we present both our side and the other side? These answers will all be impacted by the audience's processing route.

**6.2.2.1. Solid arguments vs. emotion-based appeals.** Let's begin with an example. We are trying to persuade people to care about the amount of plastic impacting the environment and to change the way they think about plastic consumption. What kind of argument should we use? Should we present an argument filled with solid, logical, evidence including reasons for why we need to rethink plastic consumption, or would our audience be more likely to be persuaded by an emotional appeal where we scare them or make them feel sad about the impact of plastic on our planet? First let's look at the research and then we will look at three news story links to see how information was presented to the audience.

We know that audiences who are motivated and able will follow the central route of persuasion. Remember, we are motivated to pay attention to the message when it is personally

relevant to us. We also need to be able to process it. We need the time to think about it, and the message needs to be presented in a way that we can understand and really think about what is being said. If these conditions aren't met, then we follow the peripheral route. We are going to respond based on peripheral cues, like credibility, attractiveness, etc. So, I am sure you predicted at this point that when someone is following the central route, they are going to be more persuaded by solid arguments. Those individuals who are following the peripheral route will be more persuaded by emotional appeals (Cacioppo, et al., 1983). We also need to consider if our audience is likely to have a larger number of individuals with a high need for cognition. This could impact the success of our persuasion attempt. We need to have more solid arguments if we have more of these individuals present.

Another important thing to consider is how the people originally formed their attitude. You might remember in Module 5 on attitudes, we discussed the different bases or components of an attitude: affect, cognition and behavior. We discussed that some people do not have all three bases for each attitude and that some attitude bases are stronger than others. This impacted our ability to predict their behavior with respect to that attitude. These findings address that. If your original attitude formation is more affective or emotion-based, then you will respond to persuasive attempts that are made with emotional appeals. However, if the origin of an attitude resulted in a stronger cognitive base, then not surprisingly, you will be more likely to be persuaded by a solid argument (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). As you might imagine, it can be challenging to figure out what kind of audience you are dealing with. If they are mixed or you do not have the ability to determine which base is strongest, it might make the most sense to have an argument that contains both reason and emotion.

Alright, let's return to our example. Here are links to three stories on plastic pollution.



<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3791860/>

<https://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/pft/2018/5/14/albatross>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-40654915>

The first story is a summary article from a respected peer-reviewed journal. I chose this because the messages here are solid, logic-based arguments on the impact of plastic. The second reading has an emotion-based focus. It is about the plight of the albatross and finding the dead birds' stomachs filled with plastic that killed them. The final reading is from BBC news and it contains both appeals. Let's think about the audiences who might consume these different presentations on the same issue. If you are reading a journal article, it is likely you have a high need for cognition and are following the central route. This second reading and similar blog posts about people's experiences with this problem might drive you if you seek out emotional appeals about the topic. These individuals have a stronger affective base for plastic pollution. Finally, the last is a news source that might be read by both types of people. How can the writer reach them? To be effective, they will draw you in with emotional appeals, stories of individuals, animals and the landscape that are impacted negatively by this pollution. However, you will also see a large amount of information about the amount of plastic and other relevant arguments related to this problem. Both reason and emotion are needed.

**6.2.2.2. Types of emotional appeals.** There are different types of emotional appeals that we can make when trying to persuade people. Let's start with evoking good feelings in our audience. When we make our audience feel good, we increase their positive thoughts and through association, we make a connection for them of good feelings and the message. When we are in a good mood, we are more likely to rely on the peripheral route. We don't spend much time thinking about the message. We see that when people are unhappy, they spend more time

ruminating or going over and over things. They aren't persuaded by weak arguments (Petty, et al. 1993). When we watch cable television, we are afforded an opportunity to analyze these emotional appeals.

#### **For Further Consideration**

Can you think of some recent commercials you saw that attempted to make you feel good so they could sell their product to you? Ads selling soda are often good examples of this. For example, Coca-Cola had a campaign using the slogan "Open Happiness." You will feel so good if you consume this product.

Another common emotional appeal is to elicit fear. Fear can be very effective most of the time. There are, however, a few situations when it will not work. Fear doesn't work when you are trying to convince people to stop doing something that makes them feel good, like having sex or laying in the sun. It also doesn't work when you use too much of it and don't give the audience a solution to avoid their fear. In that case, it is easier for the audience to deny and continue the behavior. Humor and fear combined have also been found to be more persuasive (Mukherjee & Dube, 2012). A great example of something that fear alone isn't effective at persuading but in combination with humor is very persuasive is sex and condom use. The fear appeals would want you to think of having your life stolen from you with unwanted pregnancies and potentially losing your life from HIV/AIDS or the discomfort of sexually transmitted diseases. The addition of humor can be seen in Trojan condom ads. These ads are generally funny and they combat the fear of negative things that come from something we see as pleasurable, or sex.

**6.2.2.3. The way the message is presented.** The message can be presented in different ways and these strategies can impact how persuasive the message ends up being. There are

several strategies that work most effectively when you are processing things heuristically or peripherally, which we know happens quite frequently. We can start by looking at **foot-in-the-door phenomenon**. The terminology for this comes from the idea of door-to-door salespeople. If they can get into your home, they feel confident in making the sale. What does this strategy entail? The communicator will first make a small request. Once you agree to the small request the communicator will ask for something larger. Remember, this person's goal is the larger request, but in order for you to agree to it, they are using a strategy that plays on our need to be consistent. Once we have made a commitment, we will feel pressure to remain consistent and avoid the unpleasant feeling of hypocrisy. One of my favorite studies demonstrating this involves having people agree to sign a petition that driver safety is important. Then two weeks later, they ask for the larger request. All told, 76% agreed to place a billboard in their yard. Yes, you read that correctly: a BILLBOARD (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). Our need to be consistent and not be viewed as hypocrites is powerful.

Another technique, a variation of the foot-in-the-door technique is called **lowballing**. Lowballing is a fascinating strategy. The communicator will put forward an attractive offer, one that is hard to say no to. Once the offer is agreed to, you will come up with new reasons for why you are glad you made the commitment to this offer. This is where it gets interesting. The original offer is removed. The whole reason you went along with it was because of that desirable offer and now it is gone. What should we expect - are we upset, do we change our mind about what we have agreed to because it isn't as good as the original offer? No, we don't. We go along with it and are happy about it. Cialdini (2008) discusses this in his book *Influence: Science and Practice*. The examples he gives are great. The first one is a traditional sales situation. How many of you have bought a car from a dealership? Did you agree to a price with the salesperson

and then they leave you to make sure that their manager agrees to it? This is where the lowball begins. You agreed to the attractive offer from the salesperson. They will sell you the car for the price you want. While they are gone, you are coming up with all these new reasons for why you made this decision. The car has great mileage, horsepower, sunroof, tinted windows, a backup camera and great sound system. When the salesperson comes back and removes this original offer (which is why you agreed in the first place), you still take the car and you are happy about it. This technique is regularly used in car sales. Another great example occurred with one of Cialdini's friends, Sarah. She had been dating Tim for a while, and she wanted to get married. Tim wasn't interested in marriage. Sarah ended the relationship, met someone else and was engaged to be married. Tim comes back into the picture and offers Sarah a great deal. He will marry her if she comes back to him. She leaves her current engagement and returns to Tim. She comes up with all these new reasons for why Tim is the right guy for her. Then Tim lowballs her, removes his original offer of marriage and Sarah happily stays with him. She has all these new reasons for being with him, so when he takes away one (even though it was the initial reason for her taking him back), it doesn't matter because it is just one reason. She is committed to him, happy and not married.

The last technique we will discuss is called **door-in-the-face**. I know that two of these strategies have the word door in them and this can seem tricky when you are taking a test over the material, but a good way to remember the difference is to actually think about what the phrase says. With foot-in-the-door you can picture a small part of your body getting in and then once that small part is in the door, the rest of you is not far behind. Small to large. With door-in-the-face, something large is presented and the metaphorical door is slammed in your face because the request is too big. Then you knock and offer a smaller request, which is usually

accepted. The smaller request is what you really are trying to get. The two processes that are working to make this technique effective are **reciprocity** and **perceptual contrast**. Reciprocity is another peripheral cue. When someone does something for us, we feel indebted to them and want to immediately return to equity in our relationship. This makes sense — survival would have depended on successful relationships and sharing resources. If you were known as a taker or moocher then this would have negatively impacted your relationships. We still see this in our relationships today even though survival might not be at the core of them. So, with door-in-the-face, when your initial offer is denied and you come back with a smaller one, the other person feels like you gave in or gave them something with the compromise you are attempting to make. They then are more likely to accept that second smaller offer because they feel indebted to your compromise.

The second reason you went along was perceptual contrast. This cue deals with the change in perception related to how things are presented. So, in the door-in-the-face situation, we are presented with something large and then something small. The second presentation of the smaller item after the large item changes our perception and we now see it as smaller than if we had just been presented with the small item alone. Let's look at a few examples. First, I want you to clean the whole house. You don't want to. Okay, how about you just clean your room? Well, based on what we just learned, this should drastically increase the likelihood that you will clean your room than if I had originally just asked you to clean your room. First, you want to reciprocate my compromise, and second, your room seems much smaller after being compared to the WHOLE house. This will be a great tool for persuading roommates, spouses, or children to do the small things you want (just clean your room).

**For Your Consideration**

Can you think of something large that you want? What would be a way of using foot-in-the-door to get it? Can you think of a time foot-in-the-door was used on you? Have you ever experienced lowballing or used it on someone else? What was the situation? What was the initial attractive offer and what other reasons kept you from changing your mind when the initial offer was removed? What was your initial offer you used and then took away? Finally, think of an example of door-in-the-face? Were you the persuader or the person being persuaded? What was the situation?

**6.2.2.4. One-sided or two-sided appeals.** The last common question about message content has to do with whether you can be more successful with just presenting your side of the argument or if you need to present both sides to be effective. Again, it really depends. One-sided appeals work best when the audience agrees with you. A one-sided appeal can be the wrong choice if the audience processes through the central route. It will motivate them to seek out the other side and could result in trust issues. Which if you remember from earlier in this section, if you are not seen as a trustworthy source, that can really damage your effectiveness. The two-sided appeal is most effective and enduring when the audience disagrees with you. It can be useful right from the start to address the opposing side and then present your argument. If you watch television with courtroom scenes you often see this technique. The prosecutor or defense attorney will start with “my opposition is going to tell you X, but I want you to see it this way”.

When they don't do this, you are going to spend more time thinking of the opposing arguments while they are talking rather than listening to their case.

An illustrative example comes from a study done at a university encouraging recycling. They placed signs on the trash cans that said "No Aluminum Cans Please!!! Use Recycler Located on First Floor Near Entrance." Underneath that sign was a smaller one that said, "It may be inconvenient, but it is important." After adding the second sign, which turned the one-sided appeal into a two-sided appeal, 80% recycled compared to 40% before it was added (Werner, et al., 2002).

### **For Your Consideration**

Return to our example of plastic pollution from the beginning of the section. How do the different types of readings present the message? Are they one-sided or two-sided? Plastic obviously serves us well in a lot of situations. In fact, it may be impossible to completely avoid it. So, who is the audience? If you are reading a blog or an emotionally geared piece, then it is quite likely that they are only using a one-sided appeal. However, if part of your audience might disagree or have a high need for cognition, you should use the two-sided appeal.

### 6.3. A Closer Look at Cults: Dangers and Resistance to Persuasion

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Exemplify what a cult is
- Examine the persuasion processes used against us
- Clarify ways to resist these attempts at persuasion

We should start by acknowledging that persuasion can be good, neutral or bad (which we will look at more closely with our cult examples). We can persuade people to stop bad habits, vote for someone who can positively change our world, think more about their plastic consumption, clean their rooms, and/or marry you. The focus of this section is on the dangers, which we see when people attempt to take advantage of our tendency to automatically respond to peripheral cues or triggers as we save our cognitive resources. Salespeople, con artists, politicians, and crappy relationship partners, are a variety of people who can use our natural tendencies against us. This section will focus on the danger of cults. There are two we will look at and the persuasion techniques that were utilized. We will then look at some suggestions for fighting against our automatic tendencies.

#### 6.3.1. Two Examples of Cults

The first example of a cult is from the late 1950s and is not a well-known cult. In fact, I couldn't find anything about it through casual searches without its connection to the psychological researchers who studied it. Festinger, who you might remember for his work with cognitive dissonance, was interested in how doomsday cult members could continue on with the



group after the predicted end didn't arrive. A great resource that covers this is the original source — a book written by Festinger, Riecken, & Schacter and published in 1964 about their experience participating in this very small doomsday cult in Chicago. They called themselves the Seekers and were originally smaller than 30 members. They were led by two middle-aged individuals and the study gave them alias names to protect their identities. The male was named Dr. Armstrong and he was a physician at the college. The female, and person receiving the messages from the aliens called Guardians, was given the name Mrs. Keech. She predicted that an end of the world event would occur before dawn on Dec. 21, 1954 and the true believers would be picked up at dawn by the Guardians (aliens). This alone is interesting, but the more interesting part is that three psychologists gave us an inside view of exactly what happened from the announcement of the “end” and then through the weeks leading up to the event and the night of the so-called “end”. As reported by the psychologists who were present, when the aliens didn't pick them up, everyone sat in silence, visibly upset. They sat together waiting for the time of the flood and the end of the world. This time also came and went without incident. Mrs. Keech immediately afterward received a new message from the Guardians saying that all of their light and faith had prevented the tragic event. One person got up and left, disgusted by this — that was it. Mrs. Keech then received another message that they needed to contact the media and anyone who would listen. They needed to get the word out about their group and recruit members. Everyone left and started following the message. What is interesting about this approach is that prior to the failed end of the world event, they were extremely secretive and reluctant to add new members. However, at least that night and for a while after, the members of this group increased their commitment to the cult. Today we know Mrs. Keech's actual name was Dorothy Martin, a housewife from Chicago. The group in Chicago didn't remain and after

being threatened with commitment to a mental facility, she moved to Peru where she continued to receive messages and changed her name to Sister Thedra, starting the Association of Sananda. This organization continued until 1992 when she died.

For more on this group, please visit: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/association-sananda-and-sanat-kumara>

What kind of persuasion principles were employed in this situation? We see prior to the doomsday event that members made drastic decisions; they quit jobs, sold houses, and cut ties with family/friends who didn't understand. They needed to remain consistent with these choices, and their commitment to the cult was very high. When the event passed and nothing happened, they used **social proof** — our heuristic that if others are doing it, it must be correct — through the recruitment of new members and the publicizing of their group to help them stay committed to the group. In the end, most people left the group, but this isn't the case for most cults.

The second example is Jonestown and cult leader Jim Jones. Jim Jones started as simply a pastor of what seemed like an all-inclusive church in Indiana in 1955. In a time of segregation and ostracism of those that were different, Jim created a utopian environment where all were accepted. It was a place where those without family could find family and those who sought a place of equality for all could find it. He moved the church to California in 1965, fearing nuclear war. It was from this point that the church (now called the People's Temple) started traveling down a more sinister path. Most members started by just attending once a week and then committing to more nights a week. They would encourage their friends and family to join. They gave a small amount of money to the church, and that slowly increased until they gave their

whole paycheck. When they moved to California, they lived and worked on the church property, which means they sold their houses and cut ties with family who didn't support the church. Jones also encouraged the children to be adopted by others in the church and for spouses to have sex with other members of church, especially Jim. He aimed to break their bonds within the church and outside of the church. They eventually moved to the jungle of Guyana as an attempt on Jim's part to protect his people and church. He believed they were under attack from everyone. After a visit from a Congressmen, who was worried people were being held against their will, was shot and killed at Jim's request, Jim forced everyone at gunpoint to drink poisoned Kool-Aid. A few who escaped into the jungle and a few from the Congressman's group who lived, helped us to better understand what happened (Nelson, et al., 2007). This cult and the subsequent deaths are so fascinating, there are many documentaries and stories written about what happened. People often think how could this happen? Why didn't they leave? How could they let someone do these things to them? People think that they would never allow these things to happen to them.

Let's look at the persuasion techniques that were used and how people automatically responded to them. They had no idea that they were being persuaded to someday voluntarily kill themselves. If you look, foot-in-the-door (which we discussed earlier) is running rampant, as well as lowballing. Jim had them commit to many small requests and over time slowly increased his requests. He did this with church attendance and church work, money donated to the church, giving up custody of their children and then breaking their marital bonds. Eventually, large requests like moving to another state and then another country were easy to make because they had already committed to so much. In order to remain consistent, they had to make these larger commitments as well. They had given everything up for this church's mission. Jim used emotional appeals to initially get certain kinds of members; those who were ostracized or didn't

have anyone such as the homeless. He would perform miracles for these individuals. The members who were doctors, lawyers and more likely to follow the central route were recruited with strong social and political messages. He provided a utopia where everyone was equal and where the elderly were given medicine and taken care of. He recruited with attractiveness and liking. He made himself credible — a trustworthy expert. It wasn't until later that people saw a different side to Jim. It's clear that these individuals committed to something that later didn't look anything like the initial offer.

### **6.3.2. Resisting the Temptations of a Cult**

How can we resist the dangers of situations like this? Cialdini (2008) offers some great tips to avoid the main techniques that are used. We will focus here on how to fight commitment and consistency's powerful pull. He suggests two ways to combat it. Listen to your stomach and your heart. He says that consistency is often important and good for us in our lives. However, it isn't always, as seen above with the cults. When you feel trapped by your commitment to a request, you often feel a tightening and discomfort in your stomach. He suggests that in this instance, the best way to combat that feeling is to bring this attempt to the persuader's attention. "I am not going to go along with your request because it would be foolish to just remain consistent when I don't want to go along." He says we can't always feel our stomach signs, so ask in our heart of hearts 'does it feel right?' Ask yourself if you could go back to beginning with the information you know now, would you make the same choices? If no, then the pressure of consistency should lessen and you can say no.

**Module Recap**

Persuasion is a complex topic, but hopefully you made it out with a much greater understanding of how you process information and persuasion attempts, either centrally or peripherally. You now know what types of communicators and messages are most effective in different contexts and with different audiences. Finally, you are more aware of the dangers of being taken advantage of by individuals who are aware of our frequent automatic responses to peripheral cues. The next module will continue our journey through social influence by examining conformity more closely.

## Part III. How We Influence and Are Influenced by Others

### Module 7: Social Influence

## **Module 7: Conformity**

### **Module Overview**

The previous module discussed how we are influenced by the message. Persuasion, as we found, works by changing our attitudes or behaviors through the message that is presented. This module will focus on how we are influenced by real or imagined social pressure to change our behavior - conformity. This module will define conformity, investigate acceptance, compliance and obedience through classic studies as well as what motivates these types of conformity. We will also look at what factors affect conformity and what motivates us to choose nonconformity.

### **Module Outline**

- 7.1. What is Conformity?
- 7.2. Acceptance
- 7.3. Compliance
- 7.4. Obedience
- 7.5. What Motivates Nonconformity?

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Define conformity and explain whether it is good, bad and the role individualism plays.
- Clarify acceptance through Sherif's classic autokinetic effect study, the emergence of social norms, and the motivations for conforming.
- Explain compliance through Asch's classic line judgment task study, motivations for conforming and the factors that impact our conformity.

- Clarify obedience through Milgram's classic study and conditions that impact our obedience.
- Explain nonconformity through psychological reactance theory and the need for uniqueness.

## **7.1. What is Conformity?**

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define conformity.
- Exemplify acceptance.
- Define compliance.
- Define obedience.

#### **7.1.1. Conformity: Good or Bad? Role of Individualism**

In Module 3 on the self, we discussed the topic of our self-concept. Remember that the self-concept is an organized collection of beliefs about the self or answers to the question, "Who am I?" We learned that our answers were influenced by where we grew up. Our socialization in a western culture often impacts how we define ourselves. We focus on what makes us unique from others at a greater level than those socialized in non-western cultures. You might remember this term as individualism, or the independent self, and it is important to our discussion and understanding of conformity.

It is that socialized desire to be separate, unique and independent that results in a negative response to any suggestion that we might have been influenced by others to go along with the



group. In fact, I believe it is fair to say that being called a “conformist” is intended to be an insult in our society. It suggests you don’t have an understanding of who you are, you aren’t being true to yourself or you aren’t strong enough to stand up for yourself or to stand alone. This is why if I asked you to tell me if conformity is good or bad - your initial reaction is probably that it is bad. Much of our adolescence is spent being coached to not just go along or fall to peer pressure because it is bad. If asked, I imagine it would be easy for you to come up with a list of things that would be bad for us to conform to — having unprotected sex, underage drinking, drinking and driving, bullying, the list goes on.

However, if we were to reflect further on the topic of conformity, we would see that conformity is in fact what holds our society together. We are social creatures and it is **conformity** (the real or imagined pressure of others) when we act differently than if we were alone, that keeps things running smoothly. Think for a moment of all the places that we wait in line. Most places we go in public require us to take turns being helped. Can you imagine if there wasn’t pressure to conform to standing in line? It might even be difficult to imagine this because we are socialized so well to conform in these situations. It might help to think of when we learn to wait in line: preschool or kindergarten. What does it look like when 3-5 year olds want something and haven’t yet learned to conform to lines? We might see a lot of shoving and pushing to be helped first. Our early socialization allows us to know that it is important to form lines, to not move ahead or cut in the line, and to wait patiently. So, it seems that conformity can be both good and bad. It can also be neither good nor bad — just neutral. It can be something like wearing a certain type of clothing to work, to church, to a dance or to play a sport. It is something we feel pressure to do, but it doesn’t make things better or worse for the person or society.

### 7.1.2. Introduction to the Different Types of Conformity

As you have been imagining conformity, you might be thinking that it doesn't always look the same. Sometimes conformity can take the shape of **acceptance**: we think that the behavior we are being influenced to follow is the correct thing to do in the situation. We agree with this behavior both publicly and privately. Let's revisit our example of waiting in line. You accept that this is the correct thing to do. So, when it is appropriate, you wait in line and agree that it is what you should be doing. Can you think of other things you conform to with acceptance? Do you accept that people should stand or sit at a certain distance from someone else? Do you accept that people shouldn't sit right next to you in the movie theater unless there aren't enough seats?

There are many times though, where we publicly go along but privately, we disagree with or don't want to engage in the behavior we are going along with. This type of conformity is called **compliance**. I always think of my husband as an example here. He hates to dress up and would rather live in t-shirts and jeans or track pants. However, it isn't always appropriate to dress in this type of clothing. Sometimes you have to wear a suit and tie or wear more formal clothing. In all of these instances my husband is complying from the real or imagined pressure of others to wear a suit and tie to a funeral, to a wedding or to a job interview. You might love talking about politics, but feel pressure to not speak about it at social gatherings. So, privately you would choose to talk about politics all the time, but the pressure from the real or imagined others keeps you from starting political discussions.

The final type is actually a subtype of compliance, **obedience**. In these situations, you comply with a direct order from a perceived authority. A doctor tells you to take an antibiotic for 10 days. With obedience, we follow this direct order and take the medicine for the prescribed

time period. Our agreement or disagreement doesn't come into play. As the professor of this course, I might tell you that I will need you to turn something in by a certain date in order for you to receive credit. Everyone obeys this direct order and your own personal feelings don't come into play. You might want to stop taking the medicine sooner because you feel fine or you might need longer to complete the assignment, but none of that matters when you receive an order from an authority — you just do as they request. In the next sections we will explore in greater detail each of these types of conformity (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

## 7.2. Acceptance

### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe Sherif's classic autokinetic effect study.
- Define and exemplify social norms.
- Clarify our motivation to conform through acceptance.

### 7.2.1. Sherif's Classic Autokinetic Effect Study

Muzafer Sherif was convinced that our views of the world were shaped by those around us. This construction of our reality or truths was necessary to give our perceptions meaning. In order to empirically support these beliefs, he conducted a number of studies using the *autokinetic effect*. This is an illusion that when a pinpoint of light is projected in a dark space it appears to move even though it is actually stationary. This paradigm was the perfect situation for Sherif to

test his idea that in an ambiguous situation we will seek out the right thing to do or a framework to interpret our perceptions (Abrahms & Levine, 2012).

In the mid-1930's Sherif began his testing at Columbia University. In the individual studies, he would bring in participants, seat them 18 ft. from the wall, turn off the lights and shine a pinpoint of light for two seconds. They were to make a note each time they saw the light move and then to estimate as accurately as possible the distance the light moved in inches. They went through 100 trials. These experiments involved two consecutive days of testing.

Confirming his hypothesis, Sherif noted that participants would develop a framework for making their estimates and this resulted in similar answers the second day. The group studies that were conducted used a similar procedure, but this time participants were either tested individually and then placed with two or three other people across three sessions of judging — OR — they were placed with two or three other people across three sessions of judging and then tested individually. Again, Sherif's hypotheses were supported. He found that individual's initial judgments would converge with the group judgments. In other words, if some participants established a framework of 2-5 inches of movement and another 6-10 inches when alone, once in a group together both would move their judgments to 4-7 inches as their new framework for making judgments. In the condition where the group responded first, participants' framework stayed the same when they were later alone (Turner, 1991). (SEE IMAGE)

### 7.2.2 Emergence of Social Norms

Sherif's work was the first to demonstrate the emergence of social norms. Cialdini & Trost (1998) defined **social norms** as accepted group rules and standards that guide our behavior without the force of law. We can also think of norms as representing what we ought to do or the

correct thing to do. They are the accepted way of thinking, feeling and behaving that the group supports. In Sherif's study, we see these collective norms emerging when the group decides that the distance the pinpoint moved is in a certain range, 4-6 inches, for example. Another classic study from the 1930's that was conducted at Bennington College, demonstrated the emergence of norms as well, but in a real world social setting (Alwin, Cohen, Newcomb, 1991). Researchers assessed the incoming freshmen who were often from wealthy, conservative families in the area and found that their belief systems lined up with their families. This longitudinal study followed the students through their college experience and after, finding that for the majority of them, the college became a new positive reference group and that the group's more liberal norms were adopted. As exiting seniors, most followed the norms of the college and later assessments in these student's lives found that these adopted norms prescribing more liberal beliefs, feelings and ways of behaving didn't change (Turner, 1991).

I think for most of us social norms become the most obvious when someone violates them. Have you ever been somewhere and thought, "I can't believe that person is doing that! Don't they know that isn't appropriate."? There are many rules for appropriate behavior in public spaces. Often the groups we belong to and that we value, socialize us early on what is expected and acceptable ways of thinking and behaving. It is typically only through violation of norms that we are aware of their existence.

Having taught this course numerous times, I ask students to choose a social norm to intentionally violate. I ask them to describe how the people reacted to their violation and how it felt for them to violate the norm. I have learned quite a few things from this assignment. First, to always clarify there is a difference between a norm and a law. Don't break the law! I have also learned that there are norms I was never aware of. For example, men have several bathroom

norms, one involves which urinal is appropriate to use under what condition. I have also learned that for most people, it was easy to come up with a norm and it doesn't matter who the person is, most people felt extremely uncomfortable violating the norm and almost immediately wanted to tell the people around them that their teacher made them do it for a class assignment. Can you think of some norms you may have violated recently or as it is often easier, can you think of someone who violated a norm around you? How did it make you feel? Did you feel like you needed to let them know that they were breaking a rule? What was the person's reaction to your disapproval of their nonconformity?

Norms can vary in importance to the group and the reactions to the adoption or violation of the norm can vary in intensity. Most often, the social approval in following the norm is what encourages us to adopt it. For little girls, they are often showered with praise for following the gender norm expectations of wearing pretty dresses, bows and playing with dolls. Little boys experience greater negative reactions to norm violations. Boys who wear colors associated with girls or play with dolls are more harshly criticized by adults and peers. Children learn early the rules of their gender group. One of my nephews told me plainly that he couldn't have the hot pink headphones he wanted because they were a girl color. The intensity of the response to the violation can vary from disapproval ("Those are girl headphones") to punishment (making fun and calling names for wearing something that doesn't fit the norm) to exclusion (we won't play with you because you are wearing girl clothes or boy clothes.)

### **7.2.3. Motivation to Conform through Acceptance**

The examples above demonstrate different motivations for conforming to social norms. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) suggest that there are two reasons we conform, normative influence

and informational influence. We either conform because we want to be accepted by others (normative) or we conform because we think it is the right thing to do (informational). It is possible to be motivated by both types of influence, however in the case of acceptance, we typically are conforming because of informational influence, we believe what we are doing is the right thing to do. If you look back at Sherif's studies, you will notice that informational influence is the motivating factor. These participants accepted the collective group norm for distance because they believed that the group knew something they didn't, they had some knowledge that led them to a more correct answer. In the Bennington College example, it is possible that initially the girls were motivated to conform because of normative pressure. They wanted to be included and liked, so publicly they went along but privately, they disagreed. We will see in a moment that this is compliance. However, as the longitudinal study revealed the women's motivation for conforming became informational, their liberal framework became the correct and right way of thinking, feeling and behaving. In situations of acceptance through informational influence we see long-term endorsement of the norms (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

### 7.3. Compliance

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe Asch's classic line judgment task study.
- Clarify our motivations to conform through compliance.
- Outline factors that influence conformity.

#### 7.3.1. Asch's Classic Line Judgment Task Study

We learned in an earlier section of the textbook about the hindsight bias. It is hard for us when presented with information to not feel like it is obvious or that we knew it all along. This is especially true for students in social psychology. As we are presented with research findings, we think this seems like common sense or why did we waste time doing this study — everyone already knows this. Every time I present the work of Solomon Asch, I like to first present what he found. The reaction of most students is “No kidding. This seems like common sense.”. It isn't hard for them in hindsight to imagine that people would feel pressure from a unanimous group and conform to them. However, what if I told you that Solomon Asch did not predict his results and that his work was actually an attempt to show that Sherif's findings on group conformity were the result of the ambiguous situation? However, Asch believed strongly that if the situation was straightforward and there was an obvious answer, people would not behave like sheep and they would resist conforming and say the correct answer.

So, in the mid-1950's he set out to support this idea with what we refer to as Asch's line judgment task study. He recruited male participants to an experiment called the visual discrimination task study. There were 7-9 men seated at a table, where one is the participant and



the rest are *confederates* (they are working with the experimenter or aware of what is being tested). Everyone was asked to publicly announce which one of the three lines matched a standard length line. (See image) For the first two trials, all confederates answered correctly. The other trials all the confederates agreed on an incorrect answer. The participants were seated so that they heard all but one confederates response before giving their own. Results did not support Asch's predictions and instead found that 76% of the participants adopted the clearly incorrect judgment of the majority, at least once. While 33% of the participants went along with the clearly wrong answer during 8-12 of the 12 possible trials (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

### **7.3.2. Motivation to Conform through Compliance**

In Asch's study we see that participants often did behave like sheep. They went along with the group even though the answer was clearly wrong. What would motivate them to conform in this way — to publicly agree, but privately disagree? Why not just say the correct answer? As you recall from earlier, there are two motivations for conforming based on the work of Deutsch and Gerard (1955). The first is accuracy or informational goals. We are searching for the correct and appropriate behavior in any given situation. There were a few participants who convinced themselves that they must have eyesight issues or that they didn't hear the directions correctly. They are trying to find the correct frame of reference or norm for the situation. However, most of the participants in Asch's study were motivated to conform from the social pressure or desire for approval from the confederates. We want to have meaningful social relationships with others. To create and maintain these relationships, we believe that by doing things others approve of, they will approve of us as well (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In fact, the more we like someone, the more willing we are to comply with their request, even if we

don't agree (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). In Asch's study, they have no intention of being friends with the strangers or interacting with them outside of the study. Why would they feel motivated to comply with strangers? Research by Burger et al., (2001) found several interesting findings. First, we tend to rely on heuristics for liking, similarity and reciprocity when we conform. This means that we are more likely to go along with others we like, others who we share similarities with and others who give us things and make us feel indebted. These situations most often occur with friends and family. The problem arises when situational factors are present that cause us to follow the peripheral route. In the case of high cognitive load, we fall back on these heuristics and apply them to interactions with strangers. This means we are now conforming to strangers who compliment us, or we think are attractive, or who wear similar clothes, or do us a favor, even though we don't know them or have any intention of furthering our interactions with them. In fact, as you remember, people will try to use these against us, attempting to persuade us about their message and to go along with them (compliance). Another interesting finding was that even with limited exposure to a person and no interaction we still see increased compliance to that person's request.

### **7.3.3. Factors Influencing Conformity**

We now have an idea of what motivates us to conform, but there are aspects of the situation and us as individuals that can influence the strength of our conformity. You notice in Asch's line judgment task study that the participant is put into a situation where there is *unanimity*. Everyone agrees with the clearly wrong answer multiple times. Situations where a majority of people express the same viewpoint or behaving in the same way will result in increased conformity. Going against a majority is stressful and can elicit negative reactions from

them, so it is easier to just go along (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). We also see that in situations where the group is cohesive there is greater conformity. What creates cohesion or closeness? One way to create *cohesion* is to give the group a common goal, making them *interdependent*. Several studies simply told the participants in the group that by working together they could win a prize. This new interdependence of working toward the prize increased conformity. Another way to create cohesion is to have group members with *similarities* — we like people like us. We are much more likely to conform to our friends who we share things in common with. We are even more likely to conform to a group of strangers if our similarities are pointed out (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). A study illustrating this effect found that psychology students who believed they were being evaluated by a fellow psychology major were more likely to conform than if the student evaluating was an ancient history major (Abrams, et al., 1990). An individual difference that contributes to the strength of our conformity is self-monitoring. You may remember learning about this in a previous module. Self-monitoring explains the way we pay attention to our surroundings and how we change to fit those surroundings and gain approval. If you remember how Sherif described our need to have a framework to navigate uncertain situations, the individuals who score high in self-monitoring are always looking for the framework so they can fit in and be approved by others in a situation. They have been described as social chameleons, always adapting their thinking and behavior to match the situation's framework (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). It isn't surprising then that people who score high on self-monitoring are more likely than low self-monitors to express false attitudes (Olsen & Zanna, 1982).

## 7.4. Obedience

### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe Milgram's classic obedience studies.
- Clarify the factors that encourage obedience.

#### 7.4.1. Milgram's Classic Obedience Studies

Stanley Milgram is one of the most famous psychologists. It is quite likely that you have heard of him or if not him, his famous shock study. Textbooks don't often give you a lot of the backstory on the researchers of all these theories. It is worth briefly examining Stanley Milgram's life to see how various aspects contributed to his work on obedience since this work has made such a great impact in psychology and the world. This very famous study is often connected to one of the most horrible tragedies in recent human history, the Holocaust. It has been used to better understand how something like this could have occurred and with that understanding, a hope to never let something like that happen again. Milgram was born in Bronx, NY in 1933 to Jewish parents who had emigrated from Europe around WWI. After WWII, the surviving members of his extended family from Europe came to live with them. The connection to the Jewish faith and his family contributed to his interest in the Holocaust.

His interest in conformity and obedience didn't start until later in his schooling. He did his graduate studies at Harvard. During this time, for one year while Solomon Asch was doing a sabbatical at Harvard, Milgram was able to work with him and be exposed to his ideas. He influenced him so much that he completed his dissertation studies using an improved version of the line judgment task paradigm and extending it to compare different countries on their level of

conformity. He collected data in the US, Norway and France. His interest in the Holocaust made him want to collect data in Germany, believing they would have greater tendencies toward conformity than other countries. Unfortunately, language and resources didn't allow for it. Upon completion of his dissertation, he was offered a position at Yale University as an assistant professor of social psychology. At Yale, Milgram began the series of 21 obedience experiments, which ended in 1962 with about 800 volunteers (Blass, 1991; Blass, 2009).

The most widely known version of these studies is the one where the learner suffers from a heart condition. It is this version that we will use to describe the experimental paradigm. So, imagine if you will, that you have just been recruited to participate in a study on the effect of punishment on learning. You show up to the study with one other person. You draw out of a hat to determine which of you will be the teacher and which will be the learner. You don't know that the drawing is rigged or that other person waiting is called a confederate and working with the experimenter. Both slips of paper say "Teacher," so no matter what you will end up in that role. The other person is assigned the role of "Learner." In this version, the learner is set up in another room with an intercom and light system. You follow the experimenter and learner into this room. You watch them being hooked up to electrodes and even get to feel 40 volts of electricity. It is explained to you that you will be giving the learner words to remember. If they get them right then you move forward with the next word, but if they get them wrong you shock them with the shock generator that is sitting in front of you (See image). Every time they give an incorrect answer, you are to increase the voltage 15 units. The end voltage reads 450 volts, DANGER SEVERE SHOCK. It sounds simple enough.

At first, the learner is doing great and getting them correct. Then he starts to get them wrong and you continue to increase the amount of shock until at 150 volts, the learner protests.

He wants out, he is experiencing pain and his heart is starting to bother him. You might be thinking at this point that you would stop. You would never intentionally hurt someone. Well, at least 65% of you didn't stop, you went all the way to 450 volts before you stopped. You kept going even when the learner yelled in pain from 150-330 volts and even when he completely stopped responding from 300 until 450 volts. Did people just sit and flip the switches, administering shock without any care for the learner? No. In most cases, they asked to stop. They told the experimenter they thought they should stop. They expressed concern for this person, but in all cases the experimenter would respond with one of the four following phrases, "Please continue or go on," "The experiment requires you to continue," "It is absolutely essential that you continue," and "You have no choice. You must go on." It wasn't until you said no to continuing the experiment after each of the four responses, that the experiment would end. You weren't physically coerced — you were simply told to go on and most of you obeyed.

There are many aspects of these set of experiments that have made them so influential. I imagine that you are all thinking about a big one. The participants went all the way to 450 volts. What did it do to them? What did it do to you just to think that you could have been one of the 65% who would have just obeyed? This study inspired a wave of work on human ethics in research and experimentation. Questions about whether we should be deceiving our participants at all, arose from this work. For the time, without the institutional review boards of today (due in part to Milgram's studies), Milgram believed that his work was worth the risk and in follow-up questionnaires almost all participants believed it was important and thought others should do it. However, no complete replication of Milgram's work has ever been done. In a 2004 review of studies patterned after Milgram's procedure, no evidence was found to refute Milgram's work. There seemed to be no change over time in people's level of obedience (Blass, 2004).

In 2006 Burger (2009) began a partial replication of Milgram's study from the 1960's. Let's look back at Milgram's study for a moment. Remember that 150 volts was the point where the learner first yelled out in pain. So, Burger decided this is the critical moment where you determine whether the person would most likely go all the way to 450 volts. He found that in the original work, 79% of people who continued past 150 went all the way to 450 volts. So, he proposed a study that stopped at 150 volts with the assumption that if you hadn't stopped by 150 volts then you would most likely continue to 450 volts. Another change from the original work was that participants were told three times in different ways that they could leave the study at any point and they would still receive the \$50 promised for participating. They also saw another participant choose to leave the study, refuse to continue. These changes should have made it even easier to resist authority, or at least that's what was predicted. Burger found results similar to Milgram. It seems time doesn't change our probability of obeying.

#### **7.4.2. Factors that Encourage Obedience**

There are however, factors about the situation that make obedience more or less likely. These situational factors include, closeness of the authority, dissent from others and the legitimacy of the authority. In experiment 7, when the experimenter left the room and asked them to proceed with a phone call (manipulating the closeness of the authority), the level of obedience dropped to 21% and those that didn't keep going often lied saying they were obeying. In experiment 17 they added dissent from two confederates. Adding dissent of others dropped the obedience of going all the way to 450 volts to only 10%. In some studies, a clerk replaced the experimenter and again, obedience dropped to 20%. To obey, a legitimate authority must be present (Blass, 1991).

## 7.5. What Motivates Nonconformity?

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define psychological reactance theory (PRT).
- Clarify the components of PRT.
- Describe the need for uniqueness and its role in nonconformity and conformity.

Up until this point in this module and the previous module, all of the topics have been examining how the power of the situation influences us to go along. We might be going along with the message because of persuasion attempts or as we have seen by examining conformity, we go along because it's the right thing to do, the pressure to receive approval from others is too strong, or we are being directed by an authority. This section will address what happens when the power of the situation elicits a desire to go against persuasion, conformity and obedience.

### 7.5.1. Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT)

The threatening or elimination of our freedoms will result in **reactance**. It is this unpleasant feeling that motivates us to restore our threatened freedom (Brehm, 1966; Rosenberg & Siegel, 2018; Steindl et al., 2015). Your parents might tell you that you have to be home by 8 p.m. on school nights from now on. They moved your curfew up. It used to be 9 p.m. on school nights. They explain that your grades have slipped and they want you to have more time to study. However, you view it as an elimination of a *freedom*. We don't believe all behaviors are freedoms, just the ones that we have done previously, are currently doing or could do in the



future. In this case, we have been allowed to stay out until 9 p.m. already and feel like it should be something we are allowed to keep doing. It is likely that we will attempt to restore our threatened freedom by breaking curfew.

### 7.5.2. Components of PRT

A review of 50 years of PRT research has found that there are four components to the theory. The first is the presence of freedom. The second is the elimination or threat to that freedom. The third is the arousal that comes from the reactance and the fourth is the restoration of that freedom (Rosenberg & Siegel, 2018).

Let's look a little closer at these components. First, as we mentioned before, people don't consider all behaviors to be freedoms. Freedoms are subjective — each person's list would be different. They are behaviors we feel like we *should* be able to do. For example, in the US, most of us believe that we should be allowed to marry for love. It is a freedom. If it was taken away, we would experience reactance and want to restore our freedom to marry whomever we want. There are other countries where this is not a freedom. They have always had arranged marriages and people do not feel reactance at being told whom they should marry. There might be people in that culture however, who have decided it should be a freedom and that is what makes freedoms subjective. This person experiences reactance because they think they should be allowed to marry whomever they wish. They then seek to restore their threatened freedom by convincing their family to let them marry for love.

In describing what is considered a freedom, we have touched on the second component. The *elimination* or *threat* of that freedom. So, in order to be considered eliminated, the freedom must be completely blocked. You can't marry for love — it isn't allowed. You can't wear pants.

You can't read these books. In all cases, the freedom has been completely removed. The other possibility is that your freedom has just been threatened — the possibility of removal is there but it hasn't occurred. We are thinking of putting a book on the banned books list. We are going to put a fence around your beloved climbing tree. We will take away your phone if you don't get your grades up. Again, you haven't yet lost these freedoms, but in most cases, it is imminent.

The threat or elimination is a trigger for the arousal of reactance to occur. Not surprisingly, the stronger the threat, the stronger the reaction. We also see that the more you value a freedom, the more strongly you will experience reactance. Another interesting aspect of experiencing reactance is **vicarious reactance**. Your freedoms don't actually have to be personally threatened or eliminated, simply hearing or observing someone else's freedoms being threatened or eliminated can elicit reactance (Sittenthaler, Traut-Mattausch, & Jonas, 2015). This makes me think of my two-year old. I wonder if watching her cousins' freedoms being threatened is triggering her to have more reactance than she would otherwise. Would the trip to Target be easier on us both if she wasn't watching her cousin being told to sit down or to not touch things? Can you think of moments in your life where you have been glancing through social media or watching the news and someone else's freedoms were being threatened or eliminated and it has made you feel reactance? You feel anger, resentment, or want to stand up against the source of this potential freedom loss.

The final component is restoration of our freedoms. The most obvious way to do this would be to engage in the restricted behavior. This has been termed the boomerang effect (Brehm, 1966, 1981). A great example of this comes from research looking at the rise in legal drinking age from 18 to 21 years of age. The newly underage students drank more alcohol than those who were considered legal at 21 years of age. They engaged in the boomerang effect by

restoring the freedom they perceived was taken away (Engs & Hansen, 1989). Sometimes, we aren't able to engage in the restricted behavior but we can feel like it has been restored by watching someone else engage in a similar behavior (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Can you think of examples of instances where someone else's behavior helped restore a freedom you felt was threatened? As a woman, anytime I feel my freedom to work in a certain career or even walk alone at night has been threatened, seeing other women working in these careers or kicking butt and walking alone, I feel my reactance diminish and my freedom restored. Sometimes our negative feelings of reactance can be reduced by expressing anger towards or derogating the source of the threat. A tragic example of this occurred in 2018 at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida. The individual believed that attractive women had taken away his freedom to be with them by rejecting him. He experienced reactance and to reduce it, he expressed great anger through online videos derogating these attractive women who were blocking him from being with them. In this case, it escalated to violence and he opened fire at a yoga studio where these attractive women were located. This is also a good example of a situation where he perceived that he had no control over removing this block to his freedom and this is most likely what led to his act of violence. He felt helpless and the only thing he could do to feel better was express his outrage at the source of his blocked freedoms, attractive women.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/13/us/tallahassee-yoga-studio-shooting/index.html>

One moderating factor, or something that can strengthen or diminish the experience of reactance, is the person's appraisal of the threat to their freedom. Some individuals will see a threat and others see a challenge. In the case where people feel like they can grow from the loss, they have a positive reaction. This reminds me of situations where people take away their own freedoms. For example, they restrict what they eat. Those that appraise the restriction as a

challenge to become healthier won't boomerang or eat the foods that are restricted. However, during appraisal a lot of people will feel restricted, experience reactance and then eat the food in excess that they were not supposed to.

### 7.5.3. Need for Uniqueness (NfU)

Besides psychological reactance theory, there is another concept that can help explain the motivation to go against the majority and not conform, **a need for uniqueness**. This concept is seen as a trait or temporary motivation resulting from situational triggers. Some individuals exhibit a greater need to feel different from others or from the anonymous majority, and sometimes there are situations that create this need to feel unique. One situation that triggers this is when you feel too similar to others making the major position undesirable. In this case, you opt for nonconformity (Imhoff, et al., 2009).

Imhoff (2009) suggests that their conclusions can help us to understand why in Asch's line judgment task study discussed earlier in the module, 25% of the participants never conformed to the inaccurate judgment, even under powerful normative influence. We know gaining social approval is important to functioning in a social society. Are there aspects of the person or situation that created a need for uniqueness? These researchers say yes. In our individualistic society, being unique has value and when the majority conforming feels wrong, it can trigger us to separate ourselves from them.

**Module Recap**

Hopefully, you now have a much clearer understanding of the power of the situation to motivate us to conform as well the rare moments when we defy the majority and stand alone. In this module, we covered the three main types of conformity: acceptance, compliance and obedience. We examined each by exploring the classic study that created the concept. We also discovered the different factors that could increase or decrease the experience of each. As we move into the next module, we will focus solely on the impact of the group on the individual. What are groups? How does the presence of others influence our behavior?

## Part III. How We Influence and Are Influenced by Others

### Module 8: Group Influence

## **Module 8: Group Influence**

### **Module Overview**

So far, we have seen the influence of the message on our attitudes and behavior, the power of the situation to result in conformity and this module is going to take it to the next level and examine how groups impact the individual. We will start by first defining what we mean by a group, and then why groups are so important to us. We spend a large proportion of our lives in groups. This module is structured to first examine the impact of the presence of others on our behavior. We will examine how it can increase arousal and result in social facilitation. We will look at how it can lower motivation to work on a group task and then how it can result in anonymity leading to conformity to group values over individual values, arouse us and change our individual performance, how these others can demotivate us and they can make us feel anonymous resulting in behaviors that are more in line with the group values over individual values. The second section will look at the effect of extremity in interacting groups through decision making and discussion by first, examining the concept of groupthink in decision making and second, exploring the process of group polarization during homogeneous group discussion.

### **Module Outline**

- 8.1. The What and Why of Groups
- 8.2. The Presence of Others & Its Impact on the Individual
- 8.3. Groups That Interact & Their Impact on the Individual

**Module Learning Outcomes**

- Define a group and clarify why groups are important to us.
- Clarify the effects of social attention through classic social facilitation and current work looking beyond classic social facilitation.
- Contrast social loafing and free riding.
- Explain classic deindividuation theory and the SIDE Model.
- Describe the work on groupthink.
- Define group polarization.

**8.1. The What and Whys of Groups****Section Learning Objectives**

- Describe what constitutes a group.
- Discuss why groups are important to us.

**8.1.1. What constitutes a Group?**

Let's start by responding to the following four descriptions. Do they represent a group?

- 5 people waiting at a bus stop
- People attending a worship service
- Lady Gaga fan club
- Students in an online course

How did you respond? What were your criteria for a group? Was it just two or more people together? Can you think of times where you were around other people, but you would not have considered yourself in a group? As we define a group, we will determine whether these four would meet the criteria to be called a group.



It may have seemed silly to have a whole section devoted to defining a group, but at this point in the textbook, you have likely noticed it's important for us to operationally define terms, especially those that are used in our everyday language. In psychology, they don't always have the same meaning. Interestingly, even in the field of psychology, not everyone can agree on the exact definition of a group. Some define groups with very rigid conditions that must be met. For example, groups must be stable, permanent, have a structure and the members need to feel the group is part of their identity. A more flexible definition was proposed by Shaw, Robbins & Belser (1981) & Forsyth (2010): in order to be considered a **group**, two or more people must be interdependent, interact and influence one another. So, let's take another look at our four descriptions. In most of the ways we could imagine these 5 people waiting at a bus stop we should find they are not a group, but just a collection of individuals. They are not interdependent, interacting or influencing each other. You might be able to imagine a scenario where the people at this bus stop do depend on each other. Maybe they talk and get to know each other and possibly even influence each other in their daily lives. In fact, the movie *Speed* turned the people from a city bus into a group when a terrorist strapped a bomb to a bus that would blow up if their speed slowed to under 55 mph. These individuals needed each other to survive this trauma, they definitely interacted and influenced one another. Of course, you can see how each description depends on your perception. There are probably worship services where people are a group, but there are also probably services where people just come listen passively to the sermon and leave, never depending on each other, interacting or influencing each other. The same goes for the fan club and the online course. Depending on the specifics of the situation, it may or may not be defined as a group. In most cases, the fan club is probably not a group. And in most cases, if the

online course is organized like the courses through the Washington State Online Psychology Program, it is definitely a group.

### **8.1.2. Why are Groups Important to Us?**

For most of us, from the moment we enter the world, we are part of a group. We have a family that we are dependent on, we interact with and are influenced by. Families are crucial for our survival and successful development. As we age, we join other groups: school-related groups, those with our friends, groups for our hobbies, sports teams, dance, etc. We enter the workforce and there are more group opportunities. We have been called herd animals because of our need to belong with others. Researchers have studied this from several different theoretical perspectives. The first one we will look at is the conditioning perspective. This perspective suggests that we learn early in our lives to associate positive outcomes with group membership. As mentioned previously, our first group is our family. These people typically give us physical and psychological support. We flourish in the presence of a consistent, caring family. A large portion of developmental research supports the need for contact and love to have healthy brain development. Throughout our lives, we use groups to get food, shelter, love and friendship (Baron & Kerr, 2003).

Another theory explaining our desire to be a part of groups is Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. You will remember from module 3 that this theory explains how we compare ourselves to those around us to see how we fit. We have discussed at several points in the text the idea that our realities are subjective and we are searching for frameworks to better understand ourselves and those around us. Social comparison gives us that information to build those frameworks. If we are in groups, we have access to the comparative information we need to

create a social reality, especially in times of ambiguous physical realities. We can also use the people in our groups through comparison to protect ourselves from inappropriate behavior and embarrassment (Baron & Kerr, 2003). This looks a lot like what we learned about when we conform for informational reasons in the previous module. We learn that you shouldn't chew with your mouth open, you should shower and groom regularly, picking your nose in public is not appropriate. All the social norms that we follow by looking at similar others would fit here, personal space norms, norms for courtship and sex, etc.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner, 1991) can also help explain the importance of groups. Social identity theory specifically addresses how we first put ourselves into a group, then we see ourselves as a member of that group and then we want to feel good about being a member, which can sometimes lead to derogating other groups (see module 9 on prejudice). In this description, you can see that the groups we identify with become very important to how we see and evaluate ourselves, self-image and self-esteem, respectively. In other words, we are choosing to belong to groups to feel good about ourselves. Choosing to be a student is a great example of a group that you could use to increase your self-esteem and improve your self-image. You are becoming more educated and increasing your chances of employment. You may even have chosen the college you attend to further increase self-esteem. It is possible you might derogate other colleges, they aren't as good as your school, to further increase self-esteem from being a student at your selected college. The theory of self-categorization explains how we choose and place ourselves into groups. The group must be noticeable or important to us in order for it to have an effect on the self. The groups we choose give us an idea of who we are and how we see the world. The groups define what we believe, what we should and shouldn't do, and the customs we will follow (Baron & Kerr, 2003).

The final perspective we will discuss is one that some of you might have thought about when we started this section. One very important reason that humans have behaved as herd animals is survival. The sociobiological theory (Bowlby, 1958) explores the idea that survival is more likely when humans group together. They can protect themselves more easily against predators/enemies and they can cooperate to create more group members, find and share food, build shelters and care for the sick and injured.

## **8.2. The Presence of Others & Its Impact on the Individual**

### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify the effects of social attention.
- Describe the loss of motivation from presence of groups.
- Clarify the processes of deindividuation through the classic and alternative explanations.

### **8.2.1. Effects of Social Attention**

**8.2.1.1. Classic work on social facilitation.** Picture, if you will, a ballerina. You can find her in the studio most days, weeks and months of the year practicing ballet alone. She has been practicing ballet since she was three years old. She is currently practicing for an upcoming show. Based on the above information, will the audience help or hurt her performance? Is she likely to do better or worse than if she did her routine alone? To understand the answer, we need to first travel back in time.

One of the first experiments in social psychology was done by Triplett in 1898. He observed that when competitive cyclists raced against others (compared to alone) they would have faster times. He believed that the presence of others would result in a better performance than when alone. So, he tested this prediction by timing children wind a fishing line apparatus in the presence of other children or winding the same apparatus without any children present. He found support for his prediction. In the presence of others, the children did wind the fishing line faster than when they were alone. Unfortunately, the findings investigating performance in the presence of others weren't always conclusive. Researchers found contradictory findings. Sometimes others improved performance and sometimes the opposite occurred and performance worsened compared to them performing alone. Research like this continued until 1940 and from there, the topic lay dormant for 25 years. It was resurrected by Zajonc (zy-ence) in 1965. He was able to make sense of this puzzle by bringing in another field of research. The well-established principle that arousal enhances the dominant response helped solve the mystery of all those contradictory studies. He established **social facilitation theory**: when we experience arousal from the presence of others, we should expect to see improved performance on easy or dominant tasks (these are things we do often) and we should expect to see decreased performance on difficult or non-dominant tasks (these are things we have never done or don't do often) (Baron & Kerr, 2003; Blascovich, et al., 1999). Based on this, if you look back at our ballerina example, you might predict that she will perform better in the presence of an audience than alone. Ballet is her dominant response and something she does often. If she had just started learning to dance, then her first recital performance would be hindered by the audience. It would be considered a difficult task or non-dominant. Why does this happen? The presence of others increases our

arousal by increasing our worry over being evaluated and hurting our reputations. The next section discusses this in greater depth.

**8.2.1.2. Current work on social attention.** The work on social attention through the theory of social facilitation focuses on how the presence of others impacts our interpersonal behavior. How do people perform on a task in the presence of others? In recent years, research has changed focus based on findings that demonstrate that social attention can impact behavior even when the others aren't present or capable of observing or evaluating their behavior. For example, when observers are blindfolded and wear earplugs the presence of the audience still impacts the person performing the task (Platanian & Moran, 2001). There are some newer cognitive models that suggest the possibility that the influence of others could be fully automatic. This means we take other people's thoughts, ideas and feelings and internalize them, so even when they aren't present, we unconsciously are influenced by their possible evaluation of us (Smith & Mackie, 2016a)

How does social attention affect our behavior? One way is through an increase in our public self-awareness. The possible observation and evaluation by others result in a worry or concern over our reputation. We see this best in work on prosocial behavior (see more about this in module 11). Research finds people are more charitable in the presence of others and that the bystander effect disappears when people consider what others might think of them. The bystander effect, discussed in more detail in module 11, is the idea that when there are other people present, we are less likely to help. This occurs because our share of the responsibility is spread out among the other people there. In other words, we assume someone else will help, call 911, or stop and help the person with the flat tire. However, a great way to remove the bystander effect is to make others believe that they will be evaluated for their behavior and people will

know if they helped or not and this will impact their reputation. My sister's children are school age and she mentioned that she always wants to avoid helping for school related functions but then she is influenced by what she thinks the other mothers will think if they find out she didn't help. We need to believe that others will evaluate our behavior and then can spread that information to others. Socially desirable behavior is driven by our concern to maintain a good reputation, which leads to successful social interactions. Strangely, even subtle cues that someone is watching (human eyes or surveillance camera) can trigger the effect of social attention. We become self-aware, worry about the evaluation that could damage our reputation. Studies with these cues saw a reduction in bicycle theft, littering and increase in desirable behaviors like donating to a charity and group cooperation (Steinmetz & Pfattheicher, 2017).

## **8.2.2 Presence of Others Can be Demotivating**

**8.2.2.1. Classic studies on social loafing.** Our discussion of social facilitation examined how the presence of others causes arousal, and that arousal results in a change to our individual performance. For this next section, we are going to see that when we are working in a group toward a common goal rather than for ourselves, group presence often has a demotivating effect. We will start this discussion with another one of the first experiments in social psychology. This study was conducted by Ringelmann (1913) and involved having male volunteers in various group sizes engage in a tug-of-war style rope pull. The group's total effort was measured by a strain gauge. The larger the group, the researcher found the total effort was smaller than if they were to total the individual efforts of each group member (Kravitz & Martin, 1986). Steiner (1972) determined Ringelmann's finding occurred for two possible reasons. The first is that when others are present, we don't feel like we have to work as hard — a reduction in motivation.

The second is that in situations like a rope pull, everyone has to coordinate their pull with everyone else. So, was everyone pulling their hardest at the same time, feet in right place, etc? This second possible reason was further explored by Ingham et. al., (1974). They had an ingenious idea to determine if coordination loss was really an issue. What if there were no other people, you just believed there were other people? So, they again used the tug-o-war style rope pull. This time though they blindfolded the participants, telling them it was to prevent distraction. They were put in the first position on the rope-pulling apparatus and told the others would be behind them in their spot. They compared participants who were pulling alone with participants who believed they were pulling with a group, but were actually pulling alone. The belief that others were present resulted in participants not pulling as hard, just like what Ringelmann found. So, the conclusion was that the presence of others was demotivating and we put in less effort, not the coordination losses that occur with group tasks.

Another early study that confirmed these results was done by Latane et al., (1979) and also had an extremely creative methodology. Have you ever been to a sporting event where the whole crowd is screaming and cheering? It can be so loud. Have you ever felt empowered to yell even louder than you normally would because no one will know that it is you? If you had to predict, in this instance, would you think you would yell louder in a group or alone? Well, I think most of us would guess that we yell loudest in a group. We would lose inhibitions and join the group. Surprisingly, this experiment showed that we are wrong. We actually yell louder when we are alone than when we believe we are with a group. In this study, once again you are blindfolded and asked to wear a pair of headphones to prevent distraction. You yell alone and then alone but hear others yelling through headphones (so you believe you are not alone). The results support previous research that when others are present, we don't work as hard. It is from



these results that Latane comes up with the term **social loafing**. When we are working together toward a common goal, the presence of others will have demotivating effects on us. These results have been replicated in many different countries and with many different types of tasks, including cognitive or perceptual tasks. Social loafing tends to be a little stronger in western over eastern countries, and men are somewhat more prone than women to social loaf. Those that identify more strongly with individualism and value individualistic traits will be more likely to social loaf, which is why western countries and men are a little more likely to do this. When a group is more important to your identity, your motivation won't be impacted as much (Karau & Williams, 1993).

Why does this happen? First, it is task-specific. It doesn't always happen just because you are in a group. There are types of tasks where this doesn't occur and things we can do to eliminate or reduce social loafing. However, let's first focus on when it does happen. It happens when there is no way to know what the individual group member contributions are. So, when individual performance can be recorded, we see social loafing go down or go away completely. A study tested this idea by taking the yelling methodology from Latane et al., (1979) and this time you either yell thinking that no one will know what you contribute (how loud you are yelling) or you wear a headset with a microphone that records your individual yell level (Williams et al., 1981). In this study, the results showed that when individual performances (amount each person yelled) could be recorded and identified, the social loafing goes away.

**8.2.2.2 Free riding.** As we mentioned, the group task is a very important indicator of how the group will impact the group member's behavior. There are group tasks where the group shares the success or failure. This shared responsibility makes it possible for everyone to contribute different amounts and the group still succeeds. In fact, as long as one member

completes the task well, the group can succeed. It is this situation that will lead to **free riding**.

This means you can decrease your effort and benefit from the efforts of others group members.

In this situation, it is important to make sure that members are evaluated and identifiable. Group members will weigh the factors of amount of effort, feelings of being needed for the group to succeed, and violating social norms for mooching to determine if they free ride or not (Baron & Kerr, 2003).

**8.2.2.3 Reducing social loafing and free riding.** If you are like me and found yourself in groups where you seemed to care the most about the outcome, then you were always worried that you would do more of the work and the other group members would just free ride or social loaf, depending on the task that was assigned. They would get credit for all your work. We don't want to live life without groups, so then it would be helpful to know how we can increase group motivation and how we can eliminate or reduce social loafing and free riding. It is important to not use groups or teams if an individual can do the task easily. Tasks that involve or require a lot of effort and work, are the kind that should be assigned to groups or teams. Similarly, you want the task to be something the group is interested in and stimulated by. Research has also found that when group members feel close to each other, are punished for poor performance or when the group sets their own goals, they are less likely to lack motivation. It is also helpful for everyone's work to be identifiable and easy to evaluate. This helps to prevent social loafing and free riding (Baron & Kerr, 2003).

## **8.2.3 Deindividuation Processes - Classic & Alternative Explanations**

**8.2.3.1 Classic and contemporary deindividuation theory.** Let's start with a demonstration. David Dodd (1985) created this classroom demonstration to allow us to

experience deindividuation from the classic theory perspective. He also hoped to show that even students and a few prisoners would respond with anti-normative behavior. He used 229 college students and 29 prisoners taking college courses in prison. The prompt that should be responded to is below:

“If you could do anything humanly possible with complete assurance that you would not be detected or held responsible, what would you do?”

How do you think your answers compare with the students and prisoners from Dodd’s work? I have used this exercise in my classroom over the years, and my student’s responses are always in line with the results from Dodd’s demonstration. The responses were categorized according to content and social desirability. Eleven content categories were established by the author: aggression, charity, academic dishonesty, crime, escapism, political activities, sexual behavior, social disruption, interpersonal spying/eavesdropping, travel and “catch-all” other categories. These categories were then rated on social desirability. Prosocial behaviors were those that benefited others, antisocial behaviors were those that resulted in harm to others or taking away of their rights, non-normative behavior was described as going against social norms but didn’t benefit or hinder others, and finally neutral for behaviors that didn’t fit into the above three definitions. Blind raters found that 36% of the behaviors were antisocial, 19% nonnormative, 36% neutral, and 9% prosocial. Interestingly, he didn’t find any differences between the prisoners and students in the kind of responses. The most common response (15%) was to rob a bank. Every time I have used this demonstration, this has been the single most common response. Between 25-75% of my students say they would rob a bank. Sometimes, they specify to help others and sometimes just the three simple words: rob a bank. In Dodd’s work, a few students said murder, rape and assassination, but in my time in a large classroom of 100-220

students where the anonymity was greater, I never had anything like that written down. The worst responses have been to slash an ex-boyfriend's tires or beat up a cheating partner. So, how do you fit and what does this demonstration have to do with deindividuation theory?

The **classic theory of deindividuation** was first introduced by Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb (1952) looking to take a more scientific approach to the study of the crowd's impact on the individual. They coined the term deindividuation to explain the effects of losing your own personal identity in a crowd, which allows you to engage in behaviors you wouldn't normally do alone. These ideas were expanded on by Zimbardo (1969) and he specified that there were conditions that must be present for deindividuation to occur in a group setting. He suggested quite a few: anonymity, not feeling personally responsible, arousal, sensory overload, novel or unstructured situations, and conscious-altering substances such as drugs and alcohol could lead to deindividuated behaviors. He defined deindividuated behaviors to be those that went against what was considered appropriate. He did believe that they could be prosocial, but his primary focus was antisocial behavior. If you look back at our demonstration, you can see that the focus here is on the condition of anonymity and lack of personal responsibility, possibly higher arousal. It is exciting to think of situations where we don't have the pressure of social norms and expectations, where we could be free of all those social restraints and the norms we follow to be accepted and belong. We won't be sanctioned or punished for violating these norms of appropriateness (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

To better understand this original way of looking at the crowd's impact on the individual, it is important to examine a few of the studies that were conducted. First, Zimbardo (1969) did a set of three studies that are fairly well known. In one study, he placed participants in oversized lab coats and hoods. The control group wore name tags and normal clothes. The idea was to see

if anonymity would result in an increase in anti-normative behavior. Those wearing the hoods and lab coats did shock others (seen as antinormative to inflict pain) longer than the control condition, supporting Zimbardo's hypothesis. We prefer our theories and research findings to all be straightforward and unfortunately, one of the things you will see as we move through the different explanations of crowd impact on the individual is that the results aren't always straightforward and don't fully support the different explanations. In Zimbardo's second experiment, he used soldiers wearing their uniforms in one condition (anonymity condition) and then soldiers wearing their uniform and a name tag in the control condition (identifiable condition). In this experiment, he found that the soldiers with name tags shocked more than those in anonymous condition, which doesn't support the prediction that anonymity will lead to anti-normative behavior. One of our later explanations will help us to understand this contradiction that isn't explained by classic deindividuation theory alone (Postmes & Spears, 1998). Another study examining the impact of anonymity looked at aggressive driving behaviors. This field study examined the horn-honking behavior of either convertibles or 4 X 4s with top up (identifiable condition) or top down (anonymous condition). The confederate would pull in front of the car and when the light changed, they would hesitate to go. The horn-honking was measured in the first 12 seconds after the light changed. They looked at how quickly they honked when light changed, how long they pressed on the horn and the number of times they honked. The results again supported the anonymity leading to anti-normative behavior — more aggressive driving by horn honking (Ellison, et al., 1995).

There is one more important contribution to this classic theory. Diener (1979) refined the theory a bit and added that deindividuation was occurring because of the psychological mechanism of self-awareness reduction. It concluded that the less self-aware we are, the more

deindividuated and the less likely we are to adhere to our personal norms and values. The well-known study done with children and Halloween candy helped him illustrate his point. In one version of the study, he has children wearing costumes concealing their identity completely or in large groups, which increase anonymity as well and he compares them to children who were alone or wearing costumes that didn't conceal their identity. The study was done on Halloween and the house has a bowl of candy with a sign that says: "Please take one." The measurement is how much candy is taken. Taking more than one would be considered a violation of the norm that is presented. Results support the prediction that kids who were more anonymous would engage in more anti-normative behavior and take more candy (Diener, et al., 1976). They are less self-aware, which means they aren't thinking about their personal norm that stealing is wrong. There is a variation where there is a mirror behind the candy bowl and they are asked their name and address, and when made more self-aware, they take less candy. Even with the mirror, those in the anonymity condition weren't affected. Researchers attributed this to the anonymity reducing self-awareness when wearing a disguise (Beaman, et al., 1979).

These studies are fascinating and it seems to make sense that anonymity, large groups, and lack of self-awareness would lead someone to feel they could violate norms and go against the group. However, the results are mixed and we don't always see these conditions resulting in deindividuation as explained by this classic theory. In particular, from above, one of Zimbardo's variations in the 1969 work. A meta-analysis of 60 independent deindividuation studies was conducted to better understand all the work that had been done on the topic and to determine where support exists for these different explanations (Postmes & Spears, 1998). These researchers first collected all the research on deindividuation that met their criteria for deindividuation and then averaged across the findings to determine what parts of the

explanations were supported by all the research and which parts weren't supported. For the classical theory of deindividuation, researchers findings were overall inconclusive. Only very small effects were found for deindividuation causing antinormative behavior: specifically, in the condition where there was a group present and reduced responsibility. This should leave us with some concern as to whether deindividuation as described in classical theory exists. It doesn't seem that anonymity, large groups and lack of self-awareness actually cause antinormative behavior (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

**8.2.3.2. Alternative explanations to deindividuation effects - SIDE theory.** So, how can we explain what these researchers found or what we see when large groups of people get together? Why does it seem like every time a large group gets together they do something wrong, like looting, acts of aggression between protestors, or tearing down goal posts? We definitely see these behaviors as inappropriate and violations of our societal social norms. It is wrong to hurt people and their property. Some of you might still be thinking about the last module and all the ways the group influenced us to conform, to go along for both normative and informational reasons (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). In fact, you might be saying to yourself, the idea of deindividuation sounds cool, but didn't we just learn that groups have powerful abilities to cause conformity? The real or imagined pressure of others usually results in us following the group social norms, not going against them. Violating norms is extremely difficult and done rarely by most of us. When we go along, we ensure that we won't receive group sanctions. We learned above that we need the group to survive, feel good about ourselves, etc.

Before we introduce the social identity model of deindividuation effects model (SIDE), let's look at the first study that suggested that local group norms could explain findings from Zimbardo's (1969) study. This study, if you remember from the discussion above, had

participants wearing a disguise to create anonymity and show that people will be more likely to engage in the antinormative behavior of shocking more than when they were identifiable. This first study used a variation of Zimbardo's study by comparing a group that wore overalls and a mask (similar to the KKK-like clothing from Zimbardo's study), to a group wearing nurses uniforms, and then a control that was identifiable. We would expect based on the classic theory of deindividuation that both groups that are dressed in uniform/disguises should be feeling anonymous. This anonymity should result in increased antinormative behavior, which in this study is shocking another human. It is expected that both of these conditions will lead you to shock more than the condition where you are identifiable. This again is in line with the classic deindividuation theory. The results found only a small increase in shocking from the KKK-like clothes and then, surprisingly, the nurses went in the other direction and shocked less compared to our control condition. They were more prosocial in their behavior. What does this tell us? What does it mean? It means that it is possible that we found these findings based on situational, local group norms. Nurses are supposed to help so it triggers a norm of not hurting. They shock less than those in the control (Johnson & Downing, 1979). Earlier I mentioned that the second study in Zimbardo's (1969) set found that participants dressed in military uniforms and wore nametags (this made them identifiable) shocked more than participants dressed in military uniforms but were anonymous. It is possible that by placing a nametag on the participant wearing the uniform that it made the group salient for them and made them consider the norms associated with the group, possibly norms of aggression. So, again, just following the social norms of the salient group.

It was studies like Johnson & Downing (1979) that sparked researchers to expand beyond classic deindividuation theory and consider other possibilities for the effects from



deindividuation manipulations. The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) that was discussed earlier in this module as a reason we desire group affiliation, was determined to be a solid framework for explaining the deindividuation phenomena and is referred to as **social identity model of deindividuation effects model (SIDE)**. They suggested that the setup of these studies and real life situations where we combine anonymity, the closeness of the group and group immersion, actually makes the group importance and norms stronger for the person. They predicted that we should expect people to conform to the important group's norms in the current context and not the larger, more general societal norms. So, I will steal the candy because everyone in my group took two extra pieces (group norm that is important) and I won't even be thinking about the larger societal norm against stealing. The one shared aspect with classical deindividuation is the focus on anonymity. They see anonymity from immersion in the group to reduce self-awareness and make group identity more salient (Reicher et al., 1995; Postmes & Spears, 1998).

So, is this model supported in the meta-analysis by Postmes & Spears (1998) that we described above? Yes. The most robust finding was that the conditions of anonymity, larger groups and reduced self-awareness (which from classic deindividuation theory, should result in anti-normative behavior) actually resulted in greater conformity to the situational norms. So, we are seeing a specific form of social regulation and not the breakdown of regulations as previously thought. This model gives us a way to move forward, and it gives us explanations for both prosocial and antisocial behavior as well behavior that doesn't fit either — similar to our original demonstration. If I had made certain group norms salient, would it change how you responded to the initial prompt. For example, family, being male or female, being a student, or parent, etc.? What do you think? Would your answer change?

### **8.3. Groups that Interact & Their Impact on the Individual**

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify research on groupthink.
- Explain group polarization.

#### **8.3.1. Groupthink**

Let's now move away from the mere presence of groups and move toward groups that are interacting. The first group situation we will examine deals with group decision making. Do groups help us make good or bad decisions? What are the group conditions that lead to better decision making? Some of the most important decisions in our lives are made by powerful people in groups. Currently, our government and judicial system both federally and locally are making decisions that will impact your lives. If you are a member of the United Methodist Church, they just made a decision to not support homosexuality in their clergy or members. Was this a good decision or bad decision? Well, sometimes with real-world examples, we can't see the valence until time has passed. Some of the most popular examples used with groupthink are ones where history clearly demonstrates the rightness or wrongness, even though at the time, it might have been ambivalent. For example, Pearl Harbor was the result of a poor group decision with a leader who clearly underestimated the Japanese ability to bomb the United States. This didn't take long for them to see that this was a poor decision with 2,400 lives lost and a large number of ships and planes to fight the war also gone (Janis, 1971, 1982). However, some

political decisions may not be determined to be poor right away — it might take time to see the effects.

Irving Janis (1971) was inspired by decisions made by presidents and their advisors to propose the theory of groupthink. Specifically, those that went horribly wrong. He set out to find a theory that could help us understand this poor decision making. As you may have noted in the research module, most psychological theory comes from empirical studies results and these together either create the theory or will, after the fact, support the theory that is presented. In this case, Janis marketed his idea/theory in a more unusual way for scientists by first taking it more mainstream, publishing in *Psychology Today* (not a peer-reviewed journal), the psychology magazine. His ideas were exciting and interesting and people didn't seem to mind that they were not supported by empirical evidence. In fact, even with limited empirical support, there are more than 100 citations of this theory and it is discussed in a variety of fields, business, psychology, political science and communication. There are even interventions that are designed to prevent it (Esser, 1998).

Janis proposed that **groupthink** occurred when group members suppressed dissent toward a poor decision because of a set of antecedent conditions. A review of the research shows that there are three different ways to interpret Janis's model. First, a 'strict' interpretation, requires all the antecedents to be present. These are (Baron & Kerr, 2003):

- directive leadership style (a leader who clearly states their perspective on the decision from the outset)
- intense group cohesion (groups like the president's cabinet are extremely close)
- similarity of ideology (group polarization can occur - becoming more extreme on a topic)

- pressure to be unanimous
- group isolation from critics
- insecure member self-esteem
- sense of crisis

The second way to interpret this model is “additive.” In this perspective, as each condition is added, the groupthink experienced by group members is stronger. There are no published studies to support these first two interpretations. There is small support for the perspective that aspects of the groupthink model do lead to poor group decision making (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998). There are also three different ways that researchers have suggested we think about the model of groupthink. First, one researcher thinks it is time to reject and get rid of the theory. There is very limited empirical evidence, and the historical evidence doesn’t account for all aspects of the theory (Fuller & Aldag, 1998). The second way to think about groupthink is to fix and possibly rethink the model. For example, Kramer (1998) believes that we should be considering the motivation to maintain political power while examining these group decisions as well as some of the other antecedents, but removing others. Finally, there are some that think we should revitalize the theory as Janis envisioned it — in fact, there are groupthink interventions already in existence being used in businesses as we read this module (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998).

### **8.3.2. Group Polarization**

The first interacting group situation we examined looked at how a group impacts our decision making. Groupthink demonstrated how a group leader can assert a group norm, biasing the content of discussion and preventing dissent from the group members. This section will focus primarily on group discussion in general. What are the possible effects of talking with like-

minded others? Most of us probably think this sounds nice. Remember, so far we have learned that we exist in a subjective reality, searching for frameworks to guide us, and choosing to surround ourselves with similar others. We have discussed, but not formally (this is done in module 12 on attraction), that we prefer similar others because liking people similar to us makes us feel that the way we see the world is the right or correct way. You can probably think of times you gathered with people like you: groups in the college, church groups, political groups, working moms, first time moms, etc. What was the result of meeting with these people? You probably felt better about your reality, but did it change an attitude or perspective that you had prior to entering the group?

Researchers found that when others sharing the same perspective are put into a group and left to discuss, they will move to a more extreme opinion from their initial opinion. This is referred to as **group polarization** (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969). The original work in this area was completed by a graduate student at MIT, Stoner (1961) was testing the common belief that a group would be riskier than an individual. The finding was termed the “Risky Shift” and spurred a ton of research aiming to support the idea that groups were riskier than individuals. It was the work by Moscovici and Zavalloni (1969) that started the support for the idea that what mattered was the attitudes and opinions of the group to start with. For example, if the group had a cautious attitude to start with instead of risky, they would become more cautious and not more risky, if they had a positive attitude toward cats, they would like them more at the end of the experiment examining people with positive cat attitudes. In the study completed by Moscovici & Zavalloni (1969), French students liked French people more and Americans less after discussion, becoming more extreme compared to their original like for their own people and dislike of Americans. An even more interesting finding is that people are unaware that this polarization is happening or has

happened. Groups discussing with other like-minded individuals whether President Obama or President Bush was a better president became more extreme in their attitudes and when asked they misremembered ever having a less extreme attitude (Keating et al., 2016).

Why does this happen? What are the psychological processes that underlie and explain our tendency to become more extreme? It is possible as you read about group polarization, some of you were thinking about Sherif's group norm work — people being placed in groups and then their responses converging. Informational influence is at work here. Instead of an ambiguous situation though, we have group members who share the same attitude or opinion, and they are presenting arguments and reasons for why they feel the way they do. This information is collected by each group member and adds to the reasons that are already held to support their opinion. This, in combination with normative influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), is what causes this effect. Remember, normative influence is why we are concerned about social approval. This group contains members who share our views, they are like us, and will likely be seen as in-group members with greater likeability. As a result, we believe it is important to be a good group member and through social comparison (looking to others to see how we fit) we will want to move our attitude in the direction that is acceptable to the group. Typically, attitude strength above average is a safe bet to make so the group members will find us acceptable or approve of us (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Obviously, there are real-world dangers to this effect. If people are only surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals, they are likely to become more extremist in their ideas. This could account for the political tribalism we see today. It is very easy to only surround yourself with like-minded others, especially with the social-networking sites that are available. We even hear politicians discuss how they don't interact as much with members of the opposite side as they did in the past. This is reflected in fewer

bipartisan efforts. What are some other real-world issues that are currently being affected by group polarization? What do you think we can do to reduce this? Could spending time talking to moderate others help move you more toward the middle?

## **Module Recap**

Group influence research has a long history. Starting in the late 1800s, it is some of the first research we did in psychology. This isn't surprising given what we learned about the importance of groups to our lives. The long history gives us great examples of how theories change and morph through time. Social facilitation shows how a theory can be revitalized 40 years after research stops when someone comes up with a solution to the problems found. This is science and there is always hope that we can get closer to the truth behind human behavior as we perfect our science and move through time. This is true of the study of deindividuation and groupthink as well, with groupthink having much further to go as a supported theory. Social loafing and group polarization are much more straightforward, but the ever changing online world provides new ways to investigate these phenomena. The next module takes the foundations laid from attitudes, persuasion, conformity and group influence to help us better understand the processes of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.

## Part III. How We Influence and Are Influenced by Others

### Module 9: Prejudice and Discrimination



## **Module 9: Prejudice and Discrimination**

### **Module Overview**

Module 9 takes what has been learned throughout the previous eight modules and relates it to the case of prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance. We will differentiate between key concepts and then move to explanations of, and ways to reduce, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and intolerance.

### **Module Outline**

- 9.1. Defining Terms and Types
- 9.2. Causes of Prejudice and Discrimination
- 9.3. Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Frame the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination from attitude theory and the three components of an attitude.
- Outline potential causes of prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance.
- Describe methods to reduce intolerance.

## 9.1. Defining Terms and Types

### Section Learning Objectives

- Restate the three components of attitudes.
- Differentiate between stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Define and describe stereotype threat.
- Contrast explicit and implicit attitudes.
- Describe the various forms prejudice and discrimination can take.
- Define stigma and list and describe its forms.
- Clarify how stigma impacts people with mental illnesses.

#### 9.1.1. Attitudes About Other Groups

To distinguish the terms stereotype, discrimination, and prejudice we have to take a step back. Recall from Module 5 (Section 5.1.1.) that the tripartite model is used to examine the structure and function of an attitude. It states that attitudes are composed of three components – affective or emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. Affective indicates our *feelings* about the source of our attitude. Cognitive indicates our *thoughts* about it and behavior indicates the *actions* we take in relation to the thoughts and feelings we have about the source of the attitude. Figure 5.1 provided a great example of how these three components relate to one another. If we consider our attitude towards puppies, the affective component would manifest by our feeling or outwardly saying that we love puppies. We might base this affection for them on thinking about how they are fluffy or cute (the cognitive component). Finally, our thoughts and feelings produce the behavior of petting them whenever one is near. So how does this relate to the current discussion?

**9.1.1.1. Stereotypes.** In Module 4 (Section 4.1.4.2) we defined a group **stereotype** as our beliefs about what are the typical traits or characteristics of members of a specific group. Notice the word *beliefs* in the definition. Hence, in terms of our attitude about another group, our stereotype represents the cognitive component.

The group that is the subject of the stereotype may experience what is called **stereotype threat** (Steele & Aronson, 1995), or the social-psychological predicament that arises from widely-known negative stereotypes about one's group. Steele & Aronson (1995) state, "the existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes" (pg. 797). Consider the stereotypes for feminists or White males. There is a definite stereotype of these groups which may be true of some individuals in the group, and lead to others seeing them that way too. The exact implications of these stereotypes are often negative and could be self-threatening enough to have disruptive effects on the person's life. In one experiment, the authors gave black and white college students a 30-minute test composed of items from the verbal section of the GRE (Graduate Record Exam). In the stereotype threat condition, the test was described as diagnostic of intellectual ability and in the non-stereotype threat condition it was described as a laboratory problem-solving task that was nondiagnostic of ability. A second nondiagnostic condition was included which told participants to view the difficult test as a challenge. Results showed that black participants performed worse than white participants when the test was framed as a measure of their ability but performed as well as their White counterparts when told that it was not reflective of their ability. Statistical analyses also showed that black participants in the diagnostic condition saw their relative performance as poorer than black participants in the non-diagnostic-only condition.

Follow up work found that helping African American students see intelligence as malleable reduced their vulnerability to stereotype threat (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002).

**9.1.1.2. Prejudice and discrimination.** **Prejudice** occurs when someone holds a negative *feeling* about a group of people, representing the affective component. As noted above, our thoughts and feelings lead to behavior and so **discrimination** is when a person *acts* in a way that is negative against a group of people. What might the effect of such behavior be on the target of the discrimination? According to a 2018 report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Discrimination affects people’s opportunities, their well-being, and their sense of agency. Persistent exposure to discrimination can lead individuals to internalize the prejudice or stigma that is directed against them, manifesting in shame, low self-esteem, fear and stress, as well as poor health” (For more on the report, please visit <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2018/02/prejudice-and-discrimination/>.)

If you think about these terms for a bit, stereotypes and prejudice seem to go together. Taking a step back from the current conversation, think about a political candidate. You likely hold specific thoughts about their policies, how they act, the overall likelihood of success if elected, etc. In conjunction with these thoughts, you also hold certain feelings about them. You might like them, love them, dislike them, or hate them. These thoughts and feelings lead us to behave in a certain way. If we like the candidate, we will vote for them. We might also campaign for them or mention them to others in conversation. The point is that the thoughts and feelings generally go together and you really cannot have one without the other. Behavior arises as a result of them. The same would be true of stereotypes and prejudice which go together, and these lead to behavior.

Consider this now. Can a person be prejudicial and adopt certain stereotypes of other groups, but not discriminate against them? The answer is yes. Most people do not act on prejudices about others due to social norms against such actions. Let's face it. If you make a snide comment about a fellow employee of another race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic group this could lead to disciplinary action up to being fired. Outside of work, comments like that could lead to legal action against you. So even if you hold such beliefs and feelings, you tend to keep them to yourself.

Now is it possible to be discriminatory without being prejudicial? The answer is yes, though this one may not be as obvious. Say an employer needs someone who can lift up to 75lbs on a regular basis. If you cannot do that and are not hired, you were discriminated against but that does not mean that the employer has prejudicial beliefs about you. The same would be said if a Ph.D. was required for a position and you were refused the job since you only have a Bachelor's degree. One more example is useful. The online psychology students at Washington State University recently were able to establish a chapter of Psi Chi, the Psychology National Honor Society (done in the spring 2019 for context). Based on national chapter rules, students cannot be accepted unless they have at least 3.0 cumulative and psychology GPAs. We have discussed raising this to 3.3. So, if a student has a 2.9, they would be excluded from the group (under either cut off). This is discrimination but we are not prejudicial against students with a GPA under the cutoff. Given that this is an honor society, a certain level of performance is expected. These aforementioned types of behaviors occur every day but are not indicative of a larger problem, usually.

### 9.1.2. Implicit Attitudes

Section 9.1.1. describes what are called **explicit attitudes**, or attitudes that are obvious and known or at the level of conscious awareness. Is it possible that we might not even be aware we hold such attitudes towards other people? The answer is yes and is called an **implicit attitude**. Most people when asked if they hold a racist attitude would vehemently deny such a truth but research using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) shows otherwise (Greenwald et al., 1998). The test occurs in four stages. First, the participant is asked to categorize faces as black or white by pressing the left- or right-hand key. Next, the participant categorizes words as positive or negative in the same way. Third, words and faces are paired and a participant may be asked to press the left-hand key for a black face or positive word and the right-hand key for a white face or negative word. In the fourth and final stage, the task is the same as in Stage 3 but now black and negative are paired and white and good are paired. The test measures how fast people respond to the different pairs and in general the results show that people respond faster when liked faces are paired with positive words and similarly, when disliked faces are paired with negative words. In another study using the IAT, Dasgupta et al. (2000) found that positive attributes were more strongly associated with White rather than Black Americans and the effect held when equally unfamiliar faces were used as stimuli for both racial groups.

Check out the Project Implicit website at - <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

### 9.1.3. Types of Prejudice and Discrimination

It is not illegal to hold negative thoughts and feelings about others, though it could be considered immoral. What is illegal is when we act on these prejudices and stereotypes and treat others different as a result. Discrimination can take several different forms which we will discuss

now. Be advised that though these forms of discrimination can happen in almost any environment, we will focus primarily on the workplace as guidelines exist at the federal level.

**9.1.3.1. Racism.** According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “Race discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). Color discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of skin color complexion.” But race/color discrimination also occurs when we treat someone differently because they are married to a person of a certain race or color. Discrimination on the basis of race can take the form of not hiring, firing, denying or offering lower pay to, skipping for promotion, not training, or laying off a person of another race or color. Harassment on the basis of race/color is said to have occurred if racial slurs are used, offensive or derogatory remarks are made, or racially-offensive symbols are used. The key is that harassment is prevalent when the offensive behavior occurs so frequently, or is so severe, that it creates a hostile environment or in the case of work environments, it leads to an adverse employment decision such as firing or a demotion. How prevalent is race-based discrimination in the workplace? According to EEOC, in 1997 there were 29,199 charges filed with a total of 28,528 in 2017. The highest number of charges filed occurred in 2010 with 35,890. For more on race/color discrimination in the workplace, please visit: [https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/race\\_color.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/race_color.cfm).

A few types of racism are worth distinguishing. First, **old-fashioned racism** is the belief that whites are superior to all other racial groups and lead to segregation and some of the forms of discrimination mentioned above. This is contrasted with **modern racism** which only appears when it is safe and socially acceptable to do so. According to Entman (1990) modern racism is

composed of three closely intertwined but distinct components. First, is the “anti-black” effect or a general emotional hostility toward blacks. Second, is resistance to the political demands of African Americans. Third, is the belief that racism is dead and that blacks are no longer denied the ability to achieve due to racial discrimination.

**Aversive racism** occurs when a person denies personal prejudice but has underlying unconscious negative feelings toward another racial group. This could result in uneasiness, discomfort, disgust, and even fear. The person may find a Hispanic person as aversive but at the same time any suggestion that they are prejudiced equally aversive. As Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) wrote, “Thus, aversive racism may involve more positive reactions to whites than to blacks, reflecting a pro-in-group rather than an anti-out-group orientation, thereby avoiding the stigma of overt bigotry and protecting a nonprejudiced self-image” (pg. 4). Another study found that self-reported prejudice was lower in 1998-1999 than it was in 1988-1989. During both time periods, though, white participants did not engage in discriminatory selection decisions when a candidate’s qualifications were clearly weak or strong but did discriminate when the appropriate decision was more ambiguous (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

Finally, **symbolic racism** (Sears & Kinder, 1971) occurs when negative views of another racial group are coupled with values such as individualism. It includes four components measured as such (Sears & Henry, 2005):

1. Denial of continuing discrimination – Agreement with the following statement would indicate symbolic racism – ‘Discrimination against blacks is no longer a problem in the United States’ while symbolic racism would be evident if you said there has been a lot of real change in the position of black people over the past few years.



2. Work ethic and responsibility for outcomes – If you agree with the following statement symbolic racism would be apparent – ‘It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could just be as well off as whites.’
3. Excessive demands – Consider this question. ‘Some say that the Civil Rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven’t pushed fast enough. How about you?’ If you say push too fast you are displaying symbolic racism.
4. Undeserved advantage – If you disagree with ‘Over the last few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve’ but agree with ‘Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve’ you are displaying aversive racism.

**9.1.3.2. Sexism.** Sex discrimination involves treating a person unfavorably due to their sex. EEOC states, “Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general.” The victim and the harasser can be either a man or woman, and of the same sex. In 1997, the EEOC had 24,728 charges filed for sex-based discrimination and in 2017 this number was 25,605. The peak charges filed was 30,356 in 2012. For more on sex discrimination in the work place, please visit: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sex.cfm>.

**9.1.3.3. Ageism.** According to the EEOC, age discrimination occurs when an applicant or employee is treated less favorably due to their age. EEOC writes, “The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) forbids age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older. It

does not protect workers under the age of 40, although some states have laws that protect younger workers from age discrimination.” Interestingly, it is not illegal for an employer to favor an older worker over a younger one, even if both are over the age of 40. In 1997, the EEOC had 15,785 charges filed for age discrimination and in 2017 this number was 18,376. The peak charges filed was 24,582 filed in 2008. For more on age discrimination in the work place, please visit: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/age.cfm>.

**9.1.3.4. Weight discrimination.** Discrimination does occur in relation to a person’s weight, or as the Council on Size and Weight Discrimination says, “for people who are heavier than average.” They call for equal treatment in the job market and on the job; competent and respectful treatment by health care professionals; the realization that happy, attractive, and capable people come in all sizes; and state that each person has the responsibility to stand up for themselves and others suffering weight discrimination. The group also notes that the media often portrays the obese in a negative light and promotes people’s fear of fat and obsession with thinness. Finally, they write, “We stand in solidarity with those who experience discrimination based on based on ethnicity, skin color, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or other traits. Our mission is to make people aware of discrimination based on size, shape, and weight, and to work to end such discrimination.” For more on the council, please visit: <http://cswd.org/>. To read about workplace weight discrimination issues, please check out the Time article from August 16, 2017.: <http://time.com/4883176/weight-discrimination-workplace-laws/>

**9.1.3.5. Disability discrimination.** According to EEOC, disability discrimination occurs when an employer or other entity, “treats an applicant or employee less favorably because she has a history of a disability (such as cancer that is controlled or in remission) or because she is believed to have a physical or mental impairment that is not transitory (lasting or expected to last

six months or less) and minor (even if she does not have such an impairment).” The law also requires an employer (or in the cases of students, a university) to provide a reasonable accommodation to an employee with a disability, unless it would cause significant difficulty or expense. For more on disability discrimination in the workplace, please visit:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/disability.cfm>.

#### 9.1.4. Stigmatization

Overlapping with prejudice and discrimination in terms of how people from other groups are treated is **stigma**, or when negative stereotyping, labeling, rejection, devaluation, and/or loss of status occur due to membership in a particular social group such as being Hispanic, Jewish, or a Goth; or due to a specific characteristic such as having a mental illness or cancer. Stigma takes on three forms as described below:

- *Public stigma* – When members of a society endorse negative stereotypes of people from another group and discriminate against them. They might avoid them all together resulting in social isolation. An example is when an employer intentionally does not hire a person because their mental illness is discovered.
- *Label avoidance* – In order to avoid being labeled as “crazy” or “nuts” people needing care may avoid seeking it all together or stop care once started. Due to these labels, funding for mental health services or aid to compromised groups could be restricted and instead, physical health services funded.
- *Self-stigma* – When people from another group internalize the negative stereotypes and prejudice, and in turn, discriminate against themselves. They may experience shame, reduced self-esteem, hopelessness, low self-efficacy, and a reduction in

coping mechanisms. An obvious consequence of these potential outcomes is the *why try* effect, or the person saying ‘Why should I try and get that job. I am not worthy of it’ (Corrigan, Larson, & Rusch, 2009; Corrigan, et al., 2016).

Another form of stigma that is worth noting is that of **courtesy stigma** or when stigma affects people associated with the person with a mental disorder, physical disability, or who is overweight or obese. Karnieli-Miller et. al. (2013) found that families of the afflicted were often blamed, rejected, or devalued when others learned that a family member had a serious mental illness (SMI). Due to this they felt hurt and betrayed and an important source of social support during the difficult time had disappeared, resulting in greater levels of stress. To cope, they had decided to conceal their relative’s illness, and some parents struggled to decide whether it was their place to disclose versus the relative’s place. Others fought with the issue of confronting the stigma through attempts at education or to just ignore it due to not having enough energy or desiring to maintain personal boundaries. There was also a need to understand responses of others and to attribute it to a lack of knowledge, experience, and/or media coverage. In some cases, the reappraisal allowed family members to feel compassion for others rather than feeling put down or blamed. The authors concluded that each family “develops its own coping strategies which vary according to its personal experiences, values, and extent of other commitments” and that “coping strategies families employ change over-time.”

**9.1.4.1. The case of stigma and mental illness.** Effects of stigma for those with a mental illness include experiencing work-related discrimination resulting in higher levels of self-stigma and stress (Rusch et al., 2014), higher rates of suicide, especially when treatment is not available (Rusch, Zlati, Black, and Thornicroft, 2014; Rihmer & Kiss, 2002), and a decreased likelihood of future help-seeking intention in a university sample (Lally et al., 2013). The results of the latter

study also showed that personal contact with someone with a history of mental illness led to a decreased likelihood of seeking help. This is important because 48% of the sample stated that they needed help for an emotional or mental health issue during the past year but did not seek help. Similar results have been reported in other studies (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009). It is important to also point out that social distance, a result of stigma, has also been shown to increase throughout the life span suggesting that anti-stigma campaigns should focus on older people primarily (Schomerus, et al., 2015).

To help deal with stigma in the mental health community, Papish et al. (2013) investigated the effect of a one-time contact-based educational intervention compared to a four-week mandatory psychiatry course on the stigma of mental illness among medical students at the University of Calgary. The course included two methods involving contact with people who had been diagnosed with a mental disorder – patient presentations or two, one-hour oral presentations in which patients shared their story of having a mental illness; and “clinical correlations” in which students are mentored by a psychiatrist while they directly interacted with patients with a mental illness in either inpatient or outpatient settings. Results showed that medical students did hold a stigma towards mental illness and that comprehensive medical education can reduce this stigma. As the authors stated, “These results suggest that it is possible to create an environment in which medical student attitudes towards mental illness can be shifted in a positive direction.” That said, the level of stigma was still higher for mental illness than it was for a stigmatized physical illness, such as type 2 diabetes mellitus.

What might happen if mental illness is presented as a treatable condition? McGinty, Goldman, Pescosolido, and Barry (2015) found that portraying schizophrenia, depression, and heroin addiction as untreated and symptomatic increased negative public attitudes towards

people with these conditions but when the same people were portrayed as successfully treated, the desire for social distance was reduced, there was less willingness to discriminate against them, and belief in treatment's effectiveness increased in the public.

Self-stigma has also been shown to affect self-esteem, which then affects hope, which then affects quality of life among people with SMI. As such, hope should play a central role in recovery (Mashiach-Eizenberg et al., 2013). Narrative Enhancement and Cognitive Therapy (NECT) is an intervention designed to reduce internalized stigma and targets both hope and self-esteem (Yanos et al., 2011). The intervention replaces stigmatizing myths with facts about the illness and recovery which leads to hope in clients and greater levels of self-esteem. This may then reduce susceptibility to internalized stigma.

Stigma has been shown to lead to health inequities (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013) prompting calls for stigma change. Targeting stigma leads to two different agendas. The *services agenda* attempts to remove stigma so the person can seek mental health services while the *rights agenda* tries to replace discrimination that “robs people of rightful opportunities with affirming attitudes and behavior” (Corrigan, 2016). The former is successful when there is evidence that people with mental illness are seeking services more or becoming better engaged while the latter is successful when there is an increase in the number of people with mental illnesses in the workforce and receiving reasonable accommodations. The federal government has tackled this issue with landmark legislation such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 though protections are not uniform across all subgroups due to “1) explicit language about inclusion and exclusion criteria in the statute or implementation rule,

2) vague statutory language that yields variation in the interpretation about which groups qualify for protection, and 3) incentives created by the legislation that affect specific groups differently” (Cummings, Lucas, and Druss, 2013).

## 9.2. Causes of Prejudice and Discrimination

### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify how social identity theory and social categorization explain prejudice and discrimination.
- Describe how negative group stereotypes and prejudice are socialized.
- Explain whether emotions can predict intolerance.
- Discuss theories explaining the inevitability of intergroup rivalry and conflict over limited resources.
- Clarify how attribution theory explains prejudice and discrimination.

### 9.2.1. Social Identity Theory and Social Categorization

**Social identity theory** asserts that people have a proclivity to categorize their social world into meaningfully simplistic representations of groups of people. These representations are then organized as *prototypes*, or “fuzzy sets of a relatively limited number of category defining features that not only define one category but serve to distinguish it from other categories” (Foddy & Hogg, 1999). This *social categorization* process leads us to emphasize the perceived similarities within our group and the differences between groups and involves the self. We construct **in-groups**, or groups we identify with, and **out-groups**, or groups that are not our own, and categorize the self as an in-group member. From this, behavior is generated such that the self

is assimilated to the salient in-group prototype which defines specific cognitions, affect, and behavior we may exhibit. We favor ingroups, called **ingroup favoritism**, to enhance our own self-esteem and produce a positive self-concept. Another consequence is that we tend to see members of the outgroup as similar to one another while our ingroup is seen as varied, called the **outgroup homogeneity effect** (Park & Rothbart, 1982). One reason why this might occur is that we generally have less involvement with individual members of outgroups and so are less familiar with them. If we have contact, then they are less likely to be seen as homogeneous.

Tajfel et al. (1979) stated that we associate the various social categories with positive or negative value connotations which in turn lead to a positive or negative social identity, based on the evaluations of groups that contribute to our social identity. We also evaluate our group by making a *social comparison* to other groups. They write, “positively discrepant comparisons between in-group and out-group produce high prestige; negatively discrepant comparisons between in-group and out-group result in low prestige” (pg. 60). We desire favorable comparisons between the in-group and some relevant out-groups meaning the in-group is seen as distinct. Our self-esteem can be boosted through our personal achievements or by being associated with successful groups.

### 9.2.2. Socialization of Negative Group Stereotypes and Prejudice

It should not be a surprise to learn that one way we acquire stereotypes and prejudice is to simply learn them in childhood. Three main, complementary and not competitive, learning models explain how this might occur. In fact, they explain how we acquire and then subsequently maintain such cognitions and emotional reactions to other groups. They could also account for why discriminatory acts are committed.



First, **observational learning** is learning by simply watching others, or you might say we **model** their behavior. Albert Bandura conducted the pivotal research on observational learning in which children were first brought into a room to watch a video of an adult playing nicely or aggressively with a Bobo doll. This was a model. Next, the children are placed in a room with a lot of toys in it. In the room is a highly prized toy but they are told they cannot play with it. All other toys are fine and a Bobo doll is in the room. Children who watched the aggressive model behaved aggressively with the Bobo doll while those who saw the nice model, played nice. Both groups were frustrated when deprived of the coveted toy. In relation to our discussion of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, a child may observe a parent utter racial slurs, make derogatory gestures, or engage in behavior intended to hurt another group. The child can learn to express the same attitudes both in terms of cognitions and affect, and possibly through subsequent actions they make. So, the child may express the stereotype of a group and show negative feelings toward that group, and then later state a racial slur at a member of the group or deny them some resource they are legally able to obtain in keeping with discrimination.... And all because they saw their parents or other key figures do the same at some earlier time in life. Keep in mind this all can happen without the parent ever actually ever trying to teach the child such attitudes.

Second, **respondent conditioning** occurs when we link a previously neutral stimulus (NS) with a stimulus that is unlearned or inborn, called an unconditioned stimulus (US). With repeated pairings of NS and US, the organism will come to make a response to the NS and not the US. How so? According to respondent conditioning, learning occurs in three phases: preconditioning, conditioning, and postconditioning. Preconditioning signifies that some learning is already present. There is no need to learn it again. The US yields an unconditioned response

(UR). It is un-conditioned meaning it is not (un) learned (conditioned). Conditioning is when learning occurs and in respondent conditioning this is the pairing of the neutral stimulus and unconditioned stimulus which recall yields an UR. Postconditioning, or *after* (post) learning (conditioning) has occurred, establishes a *new* and not naturally occurring relationship of a conditioned stimulus (CS; previously the NS) and conditioned response (CR; the same response). In Pavlov's classic experiments, dogs salivated in response to food (US and UR); no learning was necessary. But Pavlov realized that dogs salivated even before they had the food in front of them. They did so when they heard footsteps coming down or at the sound of a bell (the NS which cause no response initially). With enough pairings, the dogs came to realize that the bell (NS formerly and now a CS) indicated food was coming and salivated (previously the UR and now the CR). How does this relate to learning prejudice and stereotypes? Children may come to associate certain groups (initially a NS) with such things as crime, poverty, and other negative characteristics. Now in respondent conditioning these stimuli were initially neutral like the groups but through socialization children learned these were bad making the relationship of such characteristics as being negative a CS-CR relationship. The new NS is linked to a CS and eventually just thinking of a specific racial group (now a new CS) for example will yield the negative feelings (CR) because we have learned that the group consists of poor criminals who may be dirty or vile for instance.

Third, **operant conditioning** is a type of associative learning which focuses on consequences that follow a response or behavior that we make (anything we do, say, or think/feel) and whether it makes a behavior more or less likely to occur. A **contingency** is when one thing occurs due to another. Think of it as an If-Then statement. If I do X then Y will happen. For operant conditioning this means that if I make a behavior, then a specific

consequence will follow. The events (response and consequence) are linked in time. What form do these consequences take? There are two main ways they can present themselves. First, in **reinforcement**, the consequences lead to a behavior/response being more likely to occur in the future. It is strengthened. Second, in **punishment**, a behavior/response is less likely to occur in the future or is weakened, due to the consequences. Operant conditioning says that four contingencies are then possible based on whether something good or bad is given or taken away. Let's go through each and give an example related to the topic of this module.

- **Positive Punishment (PP)** – If something bad or aversive is given or added, then the behavior is less likely to occur in the future. If you talk back to your mother and she slaps your mouth, this is a PP. Your response of talking back led to the consequence of the aversive slap being delivered or given to your face. In relation to our discussion, if you make a racist slur at work and are reprimanded by being given a demerit or verbally scolded by HR, then you will be less likely to make one again.
- **Positive Reinforcement (PR)** – If something good is given or added, then the behavior is more likely to occur in the future. If you study hard and earn, or are given, an A on your exam, you will be more likely to study hard in the future. Likewise, if you make a negative racial comment at home and are praised by your parents, then you will be likely to do this again in the future.
- **Negative Reinforcement (NR)** – This is a tough one for students to comprehend because the terms don't seem to go together and are counterintuitive. But it is really simple and you experience NR all the time. This is when something bad or aversive is taken away or subtracted due to your actions, making it that you will be more likely to make the same behavior in the future when some stimuli presents itself. For

instance, what do you do if you have a headache? You likely answered take Tylenol.

If you do this and the headache goes away, you will take Tylenol in the future when

you have a headache. NR can either result in current escape behavior or future

avoidance behavior. What does this mean? *Escape* occurs when we are presently

experiencing an aversive event and want it to end. We make a behavior and if the

aversive event, like the headache, goes away, we will repeat the taking of Tylenol in

the future. This future action is an *avoidance* event. We might start to feel a headache

coming on and run to take Tylenol right away. By doing so we have removed the

possibility of the aversive event occurring and this behavior demonstrates that

learning has occurred. In the case of discrimination, if we believe a new family to our

neighborhood from a different racial or ethnic group is somehow a problem, we might

engage in hostile behavior to encourage them to move. If they do so, then this is NR

and specifically escape behavior. The neighborhood may get the reputation of not

welcoming a diverse range of people and cause future outgroup members to take up

residence elsewhere (avoidance behavior).

- **Negative Punishment (NP)** – This is when something good is taken away or subtracted making a behavior less likely in the future. If you are late to class and your professor deducts 5 points from your final grade (the points are something good and the loss is negative), you will likely be on time in all subsequent classes. Back to the work example for NR, we might also be sent home with pay or lose a promotion.

### 9.2.3. Do Emotions Predict Intolerance?

A 2004 article in the *Monitor on Psychology* notes that though most research points to the fact that intolerance is caused by negative stereotypes, at least in part, research by Susan Fiske of Princeton University indicates that pity, envy, disgust, and pride – all emotions – may play a larger role. Fiske's research team found that the emotions are not only tied to prejudice, but to discriminatory behavior as well. "It's not illegal to have a bad thought or feeling in your head," said Fiske. "What really matters is the behavior." This behavior can include bringing harm to others or excluding them, and through a meta-analysis she conducted of 57 studies done over 50 years on attitude behavior and racial bias, she found that emotions predict behaviors twice as much as negative stereotypes.

Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) proposed that the content of stereotypes be studied and argued that stereotypes are captured by the dimensions of warmth and competence. The researchers wrote, "subjectively positive stereotypes on one dimension do not contradict prejudice but often are functionally consistent with unflattering stereotypes on the other dimension" (pg. 878). It is also predicted that status and competition, two variables important for intergroup relations, predict the dimensions of stereotypes such that for subordinate, noncompetitive groups (i.e. the elderly) the positive stereotype of warmth will act jointly with the negative stereotype of low competence to give privileged groups an advantage. They add that for competitive out-groups such as Asians, there is a positive stereotype of competence in conjunction with a negative stereotype of low warmth which justifies the in-group's resentment of them. Finally, they predicted that different combinations of stereotypic warmth and competence bring about unique intergroup emotions, directed toward various societal groups such that "pity targets the warm but not competent subordinates; envy targets the competent but

not warm competitors; contempt is reserved for out-groups deemed neither warm nor competent” (pg. 879).

The data provided from nine survey samples show that perceived competence and warmth did indeed differentiate out-group stereotypes; that many out-groups are perceived as competent but not warm (or warm but not competent); that perceived social status predicted perceived competence and perceived competition predicted perceived lack of warmth; and that pity, envy, contempt, and admiration differentiated the four combinations of perceived warmth and competence. In relation to the last finding, the authors speculated, “Both envy items (i.e., envious, jealous) reflect the belief that another possesses some object that the self desires but lacks; this, then, acknowledges the out-groups’ possession of good qualities and also that the out-group is responsible for the in-group’s distress. In short, envy and jealousy are inherently mixed emotions. In a similar way, pity and sympathy directed toward warm but incompetent out-groups suggest a mixture of subjectively good feelings and acknowledgement of the out-groups’ inferior position. Again, pity is inherently a mixed emotion” (pg. 897). The results of the study fly in the face of the consensus of social psychologists that prejudice involves simultaneous dislike and disrespect for an out-group, but instead, shows that out-group prejudice often focuses on one or the other, but not both.

For more from the Monitor on Psychology article, please visit:

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/oct04/prejudice>

#### 9.2.4. Is Intergroup Rivalry Inevitable Due to Competition for Limited Resources?

Another line of thinking does assert that groups will engage in prejudicial and discriminatory practices because they are competing for limited resources. The interesting thing is that competition comes about due to either real imbalances of power and resources, called the **realistic group conflict theory** (LeVine & Campbell, 1972) or perceived imbalances, called **relative deprivation**. In the case of the former, groups competing for limited jobs may engage in discriminatory practices or make prejudicial comments about the other group. In the case of the latter, simply believing that your situation is improving but slower than other groups, can lead to instances of intergroup conflict. Using the realistic group conflict theory as a base, Brief et al. (2005) found that the closer whites lived to blacks and the more interethnic conflict they perceived in their communities, the more negative their reaction was to diverse workplaces.

Dominant groups likewise want to maintain the status quo or continue their control over subordinate groups. Those with a **social dominance orientation (SDO)** view their ingroup as dominant and superior to outgroups and seek to enforce the hierarchy as it exists now. They take on roles that enhance or attenuate inequality; are generally intolerant; are not empathetic and altruistic; express less concern for others; are generally more conservative, patriotic, nationalistic, and express cultural elitism; support chauvinist policies; do not support gay rights, women's rights, social welfare programs, ameliorative racial policy, and environmental policy; generally support military programs; support wars for dominance but not war unconditionally; and finally the orientation is more present in males than females (Pratto et al., 1994). The orientation was also found to be distinct from an **authoritarian personality** in which a person displays an exaggerated submission to authority, is intolerant of weakness, endorses the use of punitive measures toward outgroup members or deviants, and conformity to ingroup leaders

(Adorno et al., 1950), though Pratto et al. (1994) do indicate that SDO does predict many of the social attitudes conceptually associated with authoritarianism such as ethnocentrism, punitiveness, and conservatism. It is also distinct from social identity theory such that, “Social identity theory posits out-group denigration as a device for maintaining positive social identity; social dominance theory posits it as a device to maintain superior group status” (pg. 757).

The **system justification theory** proposes that people are motivated to varying degrees, to defend, bolster, and justify existing social, political, and economic arrangements, also known as the status quo, to maintain their advantaged position. These behaviors legitimize the social hierarchy as it currently exists, even if they hold a disadvantaged place in this system (Jost, 2011). In the case of the disadvantaged, they may assert that the system is fair and just and display outgroup favoritism to those who perform well in the system.

### 9.2.5. Attribution Theory

Recall from Module 4 (Section 4.2.1) **attribution theory** (Heider, 1958) asserts that people are motivated to explain their own and other people’s behavior by attributing causes of that behavior to either something in themselves or a trait they have, called a **dispositional attribution**, or to something outside the person called a **situational attribution**. We also commit the **fundamental attribution error** (FAE; Jones & Harris, 1967) which is an error in assigning a cause to another's behavior in which we automatically assume a dispositional reason for his or her actions and ignore situational factors. Related to the current discussion of prejudice and discrimination, we commit the cognitive error of **group-serving bias** by ignoring an outgroup member’s positive behavior and assigning dispositional attributions to their negative behavior while attributing negative behavior to situational factors and positive behavior to



dispositional ones for ingroup members. One study investigated harmful behavior and found evidence of the group-serving bias insofar as members of the Italian Communist party said outgroup actors were more aggressive and intentional in their harmful actions than in-group actors (Schrujjer et al., 1994).

Finally, **attributional ambiguity** refers to the confusion a person may experience over whether or not they are being treated prejudicially (Crocker & Major, 1989). Though no one would want to be discriminated against or experience prejudice, knowing this is the cause of negative feedback can actually protect one's self-esteem. Women in one experiment received negative feedback from an evaluator they knew was prejudiced and showed less depression than women who received negative feedback from a nonprejudiced evaluator. In a second experiment, white and black college students were given interpersonal feedback from a white evaluator who could either see them or not. Black participants were more likely to attribute negative feedback to prejudice than positive feedback. Additionally, being seen by the evaluator protected the self-esteem of Black participants from negative feedback but lowered the self-esteem of those who were given positive feedback (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991).

### 9.3. Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Define tolerance.
- Describe ways to promote tolerance and improve intergroup relations.
- Describe Allport's intergroup contact theory and state whether it is supported by research.
- Describe the Jigsaw classroom and evidence supporting it.

In the previous two sections we have discussed attitudes we hold toward other groups and how the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination reflect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitudes, respectively. We then proposed potential causes of prejudice and discrimination outgroups face. So how do we go about reducing prejudice and discrimination?

#### 9.3.1. Teaching Tolerance

As a starting point, one way to reduce prejudice and discrimination (or reduce negative feelings rooted in cognitions about another group and negative behavior made in relation to the group) is by teaching **tolerance** or “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference.” The Teaching Tolerance movement (<https://www.tolerance.org/>), founded in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center to prevent the growth of hate, provides free resources to teachers, educators, and administrators from kindergarten to high school. The program centers on social justice, which includes the domains of identity, diversity, justice, and action; and anti-bias,

which encourages children and young people to challenge prejudice and be agents of change in their own lives. They write, “We view tolerance as a way of thinking and feeling—but most importantly, of acting—that gives us peace in our individuality, respect for those unlike us, the wisdom to discern humane values and the courage to act upon them.”

The group proposes 13 principles to improve intergroup relations. Briefly, they include:

1. Principle 1 – Sources of prejudice and discrimination should be addressed at the institutional and individual levels and where people learn, work, and live. The group notes that power differences, whether real or imagined, have to be dealt with as they are at the heart of intergroup tensions.
2. Principle 2 – We have to go beyond merely raising knowledge and awareness to include efforts to influence the behavior of others. Strategies to improve intergroup relations must also include lessons about how one is to act in accordance with this new knowledge. Also, as prejudice and discrimination are socially influenced to change our own behavior we may need to look to others for support and our efforts may involve change the behavior of those who express such negative views of others and who possibly act on it.
3. Principle 3 – Strategies should include all racial and ethnic groups involved as “diversity provides an opportunity for learning and for comparison that can help avoid oversimplification or stereotyping.”
4. Principle 4 – There should be cooperative, equal-status roles for persons from different groups. Activities should be cooperative in nature to ensure that people from different backgrounds can all contribute equally to the task.

5. Principle 5 – People in positions of power should participate in, and model, what is being taught in race relations programs as an example to those being taught and to show that the learning activities matter.
6. Principle 6 – Positive intergroup relations should be taught to children at an early age but at the same time, we need to realize that these lessons may not stick even though they do make later lessons easier to teach and learn. The group states, “People cannot be inoculated against prejudice. Given the differences in living conditions of various racial and ethnic groups, as well as the existence of discrimination throughout our society, improving intergroup relations is a challenge that requires ongoing work.”  
The last two words are by far the most important in this principle.
7. Principle 7 – Building off Principle 6, a one-time workshop, course, or learning module is not enough and there needs to be “highly focused activities and efforts to ensure that positive intergroup relations are pursued throughout the organization involved.”
8. Principle 8 – Similarities between racial and ethnic groups need to be emphasized as much as differences in social class, gender, and language. Though there are differences between groups, they also have a lot in common. “Making “the other” seem less different, strange, or exotic can encourage positive interactions and avoid stereotyping.”
9. Principle 9 – Most Americans of European descent value the concept of the “melting pot” but expect persons of color and immigrants to assimilate into the dominant white culture and resent them if they do not. Others insist that individuals choose a single cultural identity but by doing so communicate a lack of respect for people with

- bicultural or multicultural identities and discriminate against them. Hence, we must recognize the value of these varied identities as they represent a bridge to improved intergroup relations.
10. Principle 10 – Oftentimes it is myths and misinformation that sustain stereotypes and prejudices. The inaccuracies of these myths must be exposed to undermine the justifications for prejudice.
  11. Principle 11 – Those who are to implement learning activities should be properly trained and their commitment firm to increase the effectiveness of the effort.
  12. Principle 12 – The exact problems involved in poor intergroup relations within a setting should be diagnosed so that the correct strategies can be used and then follow-up studies of individual and organization change should follow.
  13. Principle 13 – The strategies we use to reduce prejudice toward any particular racial or ethnic group may not transfer to other races or groups. “Since most people recognize that racism is inconsistent with democratic values, it is often the case that prejudiced persons have developed what they think are reasonable justifications for prejudices and discriminatory behavior that are specific to particular groups.”

The group notes that all 13 principles do not need to be included in every strategy, and some effective strategies and intervention programs incorporate as few as two or three. The principles presented above are meant to provide guidelines for action and are not guaranteed to work. Even the best-designed strategies can be undermined by weak implementation. The principles are also meant to focus research and discussion on what an effective program would look like.

Source: <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/strategies-for-reducing-racial-and-ethnic-prejudice-essential-principles>

### For Your Consideration

So do interventions to reduce prejudice and create an inclusive environment in early childhood work? A systematic review was conducted by Aboud et al. (2012) and provided mixed evidence. Check out the article for yourself:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0273229712000214>

### 9.3.2. Intergroup Contact Theory

According to an APA feature article in 2001, to reduce bias among conflicting groups, all you need is contact (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov01/contact>). In the 1950s, psychologist Gordon Allport proposed his “**contact hypothesis**” which states that contact between groups can promote acceptance and tolerance but only when four conditions are met. First, there must be equal status between the groups in the situation as if the status quo of imbalance is maintained, the stereotypes fueling prejudice and discrimination cannot be broken down. Second, the groups must share common goals that are superordinate to any one group which leads to the third condition of intergroup cooperation. The groups must work together and share in the fruits of their labor. Finally, there has to be support at the institutional level in terms of authorities, law, or custom (Allport, 1954).

A 2006 meta-analysis by Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp confirms Allport’s hypothesis. The researchers synthesized the effects from 696 samples and found that greater intergroup contact is associated with lower levels of prejudice. They also found that intergroup

contact effects generalize beyond participants in the immediate contact situation. They write, “Not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become more favorable, but so do attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup members in other situations, and even outgroups not involved in the contact. This result enhances the potential of intergroup contact to be a practical, applied means of improving intergroup relations” (pg. 766).

To read the meta-analysis for yourself, please visit:

<http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/genderandsexualitylawblog/files/2012/04/A-Meta-Analytic-Test-of-Intergroup-Contact-Theory.pdf>

### **9.3.3. Jigsaw Classroom**

The Jigsaw classroom was created in the early 1970s by Elliot Aronson and his students at the University of Texas and the University of California (Aronson et al., 1978). It has a proven track record of reducing racial conflict and increasing positive educational outcomes. These include reducing absenteeism, increasing a student’s liking of school, and improving test performance. Like a jigsaw puzzle, each student represents a piece and is needed to complete and fully understand the final product. So how does it work? According to <https://www.jigsaw.org/>:

1. The class is divided into smaller groups of 5-6 students, each group diverse in terms of gender, race, ability, and ethnicity.
2. One student is appointed as the group leader and should be the most mature student in the group.
3. The lesson for the day is divided into 5-6 segments. As the website says, if you were presenting a lesson on Eleanor Roosevelt, you would break it up into covering her

childhood, life with Franklin and their children, her life after he contracted polio, her work in the White House as First Lady, and her life and work after her husband died.

4. Each student is then assigned to learn one segment ONLY.
5. The students are given time to read over their segment and learn it at least twice.  
Memorization of the script is not needed.
6. Temporary “expert” groups are next created by having students from each jigsaw group join other students assigned the same segment. The students are given time to discuss the main points with others in the expert group and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.
7. Students are returned to their jigsaw groups.
8. The students are then asked to present his or her segment to the group and the other group members are encouraged to ask questions for clarification.
9. The teacher is asked to move from group to group and observe the process. If there is a problem in the group such as one member being disruptive or dominating, the teacher will make an intervention appropriate to the situation. With time, the group leader will handle such situations but needs to be trained. The teacher could do this by whispering instructions to the leader.
10. Once the session is over, the teacher gives a quiz on the material. This reinforces that the sessions are not fun and games, but really count.

So, does it work? Results show that once a group begins to work well, barriers break down and the students show liking for one another and empathy too (Aronson, 2002). The same results were observed in a study of Vietnamese tertiary students such that they reported appreciating working with others, getting help, and discussing the content with each other (Tran



& Lewis, 2012). Outside of reducing intergroup rivalries and prejudice, an adaptation has been shown to help reduce social loafing in college student group projects (Voyles, Bailey, & Durik, 2015).

For more on the jigsaw classroom, please visit: <https://www.jigsaw.org/>

## **Module Recap**

In Module 9 we discussed the special case of an attitude related to groups and were reminded that attitudes consist of cognitions, affect, and behavior. In relation to our current discussion, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination reflect the three dimensions of an attitude, respectfully. We also discussed attitudes that we might not be aware of, called implicit attitudes, and discussed types of prejudice and discrimination to include racism, sexism, ageism, weight discrimination, and disability discrimination. We then covered stigmatization and related it to discrimination on the basis of mental illness, specifically. With this done, we attempted to offer explanations for why intolerance exists. We presented social identity theory and social categorization, socialization using the three learning models, stereotype content model, numerous theories for why intergroup rivalries and conflict occur, and attribution theory as potential explanations. Finally, we proposed ways to reduce prejudice and discrimination such as teaching tolerance, promoting contact between groups, and use of the jigsaw classroom model. With this covered, Module 9 and Part III: How We Influence and Are Influenced By Others is complete. Be sure you are preparing for your exam and in Part IV we will conclude this book by discussing How We Relate to Others and topics such as aggression, helping others, and attraction.

## Part IV. How We Relate to Others

## Part IV. How We Relate to Others

# Module 10: Aggression

## **Module 10: Aggression**

### **Module Overview**

In Module 10 we tackle the sensitive issue of aggression. We will start by defining aggression and then its types to include instrumental, hostile, relational, and cyberbullying. We then will tackle specific forms of aggression such as crime, workplace violence, bullying, school violence, domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment. From this we tackle dispositional and situational factors that affect aggression. For dispositional we will discuss whether aggression is instinctual, the influence of genes or the environment, nervous and endocrine system explanations, personality, negative affect and mood, the hostile attribution bias and aggression schemas, rumination, and arousal. For situational factors, we will discuss the culture of honor, observational learning and operant conditioning, the frustration-aggression hypothesis, social rejection, alcohol use, the media, temperature, and crowding. With an understanding of what aggression is, the forms it can take, and potential causes, we conclude by discussing ways to reduce aggression.

### **Module Outline**

- 10.1. Defining Aggression
- 10.2. Forms Aggression Can Take
- 10.3. Why We Aggress – Dispositional Factors
- 10.4. Why We Aggress – Situational Factors
- 10.5. Reducing Aggression

## Module Learning Outcomes

- Define aggression and its types.
- Identify and describe forms aggression can take.
- Outline dispositional reasons why we aggress.
- Outline situational reasons why we aggress.
- Propose measures to reduce aggression.

### 10.1. Defining Aggression

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Define aggression.
- Identify and define the three forms aggression can take.
- Explain why the addition of cyberbullying is needed.

#### 10.1.1. Aggression and Its Types

**Aggression** can be defined as any behavior, whether physical or verbal, that is carried out with the intent to harm another person. The key here is determining the intention or motive for the aggressive behavior. Aggression should also be distinguished from being **angry**, which is an emotional reaction to an event but can just stay that – an emotion. Just because someone is angry does not mean they will necessarily act on it and engage in aggressive behavior. If they do aggress, how intense is the behavior? To understand that, consider that aggressive acts occur along a continuum of least harmful to most harmful. On the extreme side are violent acts or *violence*. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined *violence* in their 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health*, as “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual,

against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (pg. 5). They state that violence can be self-directed in the form of suicidal behavior or self-abuse, interpersonal and between family members or individuals who are unrelated, or collective in terms of social, political, and economic and suggest motives for violence. They add that violence acts can be physical, sexual, psychological, or involve deprivation or neglect. For more on the report, and to view the 2014 report on violence prevention, please visit:

[https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/)

Aggression has three types. First, **instrumental aggression** occurs when a person attempts to obtain something but does not intend to harm others. The behavior serves as a means to another end. An example would be if a toddler tries to take a toy from another toddler. Second, **hostile** or **physical aggression** occurs when a person intends to harm another person by hitting, shooting, kicking, punching, or stabbing them, or by simply threatening such action. The behavior is an end in itself. Third, **relational aggression** occurs when efforts are made to damage another person’s relationships and could include spreading rumors, name calling, ignoring a person, or social exclusion.

Should a fourth type of aggression be listed – cyberbullying? **Cyberbullying** involves the use of technology such as social media, e-mail, chatrooms, texting, video games, Youtube, or photographs to humiliate, embarrass, intimidate, or even threaten someone to gain power and control over them. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, cyberbullying involves an electronic form of contact, an aggressive act, intent, repetition, and harm to the target (Hutson, 2016) and in 2015 the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) reported that 15.5% of high school students and 24% of middle school students were cyberbullied. Unlike bullying done

outside of the online environment, the target may not know who is actually bullying them or why, the cyberbullying could go viral and to a large audience, parents and adults may have difficulty managing it, and the harmful effects of cyberbullying on the target may not be easily seen by the bully, thereby perpetuating it.

For more on cyberbullying, please visit: <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying/>

## 10.2. Forms Aggression Can Take

### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe crime and its types.
- Clarify what workplace violence is and its prevalence.
- Clarify what bullying is and its prevalence.
- Clarify what school violence is and its prevalence.
- Clarify what domestic violence is and its prevalence.
- Clarify what rape is and its prevalence.
- Clarify what sexual harassment is and its prevalence.

### 10.2.1. Crime

Aggression towards others can take the form of *crimes*, or acts understood to be unacceptable within a society and which can result in punishment. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), these include:

- Cybercrimes – Includes network and computer intrusions, ransomware, identity theft, and online predators.

- Public Corruption – Includes prison and border corruption; election crimes such as campaign finance crimes, voter/ballot fraud, and civil rights violations; and international corruption such as attempts to rig a bid, to fix prices, bribing foreign officials, or money laundering or the embezzlement of state funds
- Civil Rights violations – Includes the use of excessive force during arrests, sexual assault, false arrest, obstruction of justice, hate crimes, depriving medical care, or if a law enforcement official fails to keep an individual from harm.
- Organized Crime – This involves the elimination of transnational organized crime groups (TOC) defined as, “...self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate, wholly or in part, by illegal means and irrespective of geography. They constantly seek to obtain power, influence, and monetary gains. There is no single structure under which TOC groups function—they vary from hierarchies to clans, networks, and cells, and may evolve into other structures. These groups are typically insular and protect their activities through corruption, violence, international commerce, complex communication mechanisms, and an organizational structure exploiting national boundaries” (Source: <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime>).
- White-collar Crime – Includes corporate fraud, money laundering, investment fraud, broker embezzlement, market manipulation, and pyramid schemes.
- Violent Crime – Includes gang related violence, crimes against children, active shooter incidents, bank robbery, homicide, assaults, stalking/intimidation, and jewelry and gem theft.

Source: <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate>



According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) federal law enforcement agencies made a total of 151,460 arrests in 2016. Assaults increased from 14.8 to 16.9 while rape or sexual assaults declined from 1.6 to 1.1 per 1,000 persons age 12 or older, and from 2015 to 2016. The overall rate of violent crime did not show any statistically significant change during the same period, though the trend was upward (18.6 to 19.7 per 1,000). For more statistics, please visit: <https://www.bjs.gov/>.

### **10.2.2. Workplace Violence**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), *workplace violence* is defined as, "...any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors." The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) says workplace violence falls into one of four categories: criminal intent or when the criminal has no connection with the business and is robbing, shoplifting, or trespassing; customer/client; worker-on-worker; and personal relationship, which typically targets women (See [https://wwwn.cdc.gov/wpvhc/Course.aspx/Slide/Unit1\\_5](https://wwwn.cdc.gov/wpvhc/Course.aspx/Slide/Unit1_5) for more).

In 2014 there were 403 workplace homicides and annually, nearly 23 million American workers report being victims of workplace violence. So, who is at risk? OSHA says, "Among those with higher-risk are workers who exchange money with the public, delivery drivers, healthcare professionals, public service workers, customer service agents, law enforcement personnel, and those who work alone or in small groups."

For more on workplace violence, please visit: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/>.

You can also visit: <https://www.nsc.org/work-safety/safety-topics/workplace-violence>.

### 10.2.3. Bullying and Cyberbullying

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), defines *bullying* as “...any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners, involving an observed or perceived power imbalance. These behaviors are repeated multiple times or are highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm.” Stopbullying.gov adds that this behavior can include verbal (teasing, name-calling, taunting, threats of harm, or inappropriate sexual comments), social (spreading rumors or excluding someone intentionally), or physical (spitting on, hitting, kicking, breaking someone’s things, or making rude hand gestures) bullying. The BJS reports that during the 2015-2016 school year, 22% of middle schools reported at least one incident of student bullying each week while 15% of high schools, 11% of combined schools, and 8% of primary schools reported incidents.

For more on bullying, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/bullyingresearch/index.html>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>

### 10.2.4. School Violence

The CDC defines *school violence* as, “a fatal injury (e.g., homicide, suicide, or legal intervention) that occurs on school property, on the way to/from school, or during or on the way

to/from a school-sponsored event” (See

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/savd.html>). They report most school violence occurs during transition times to include during lunch and before or after school and at the start of each semester. About half of all perpetrators gave some type of warning signal before the event. When firearms were used in school related homicides or suicides, most came from the person’s home or from a friend or relative. They write, “Homicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 5-18. Data from this study indicate that between 1% and 2% of these deaths happen on school grounds or on the way to or from school. These findings underscore the importance of preventing violence at school as well as in communities.”

From 1992 to 2015 the number of deaths involving students, staff, or other individuals not directly affiliated with the school, went from 57 (1992) to 47 (2015) with a peak of 63 during the 2006-2007 school year (Source: CDC link above). According to the BJS, in 2016 there were 749,000 victimizations (theft and nonfatal violence) at school and 601,300 away from school, or 29 and 24 per 1,000 students, at school and away from school, respectively. The victimization rate was higher for males and most schools during the 2015-2016 school year reported developing a procedure for an active shooter incident. (To view the report for yourself, please visit: <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6206>).

### 10.2.5. Domestic Violence

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), *domestic violence* is “the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another.” It can include telling the victim they never do right; complete control of finances; embarrassing or shaming the victim with put-downs; telling the victim how to dress; threatening to kill or injure the victim’s friends, loved ones, or pets; forcing sex with others; preventing the victim from working or going to school; and destroying the victim’s property. They estimate that on average, “nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States” and “1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, use of victim services, and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases.” Finally, intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime.

For more on domestic violence, please visit: <https://ncadv.org>

### 10.2.6. Rape

According to [womenshealth.gov](http://womenshealth.gov), *rape* occurs when there has been sexual penetration, without consent. The U.S. Department of Justice adds that consent involves clearly stating ‘yes’ to any type of sexual activity. Rape also occurs if you are drunk, high, drugged, passed out, or asleep as in these situations you cannot give consent. It is a type of sexual assault and during their life, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped. NCADV adds that “Almost half of female (46.7%) and male (44.9%) victims of rape in the United States were raped by an acquaintance. Of these, 45.4% of female rape victims and 29% of male rape victims were raped by an intimate partner.” Violence of a sexual nature culminating in rape starts early with as many as 8.5 million women reporting an incident before the age of 18.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/sexual-assault-and-rape/rape>

### 10.2.7. Sexual Harassment

*Sexual harassment* occurs when unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or sexually charged words or gestures have been made. In the workplace, the sexual harassment comes with the expectation of submission, whether stated implicitly or explicitly, and as a term of one’s employment. It includes unwanted pressure for sexual favors, pressure for dates, sexual comments, cat calls, sexual innuendos or stories, questions about sexual fantasies or fetishes, kissing sounds, howling, hugging, kissing, stroking, sexually suggestive signals, staring at someone, winking, etc. A February 21, 2018 article by NPR (National Public Radio) reported

that 81% of women and 43% of men had experienced sexual harassment of some sort during their life.

“The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) is an ongoing survey that collects the most current and comprehensive national- and state-level data on intimate partner violence, sexual violence and stalking victimization in the United States.” To view the report and other resources yourself, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/index.html>.

To read the full NPR article, please visit:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/21/587671849/a-new-survey-finds-eighty-percent-of-women-have-experienced-sexual-harassment>

### 10.3. Why We Aggress – Dispositional Factors

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify whether we are prewired to aggress.
- Identify any brain areas, influence of genetics, hormones, or other mechanisms that lead to aggressive behavior.
- Clarify whether personality can explain aggression.
- Describe the role of mood and negative affect on aggression.
- Define the hostile attribution bias and its role in aggression.
- Define dehumanization and victim-blaming.
- Describe the function of rumination on aggression.
- Describe the function of arousal on aggression.

Beginning with Section 10.3 we will now explore reasons why we engage in aggressive behavior. In Section 4.2.1 we stated that according to **attribution theory** (Heider, 1958), people are motivated to explain their own and other people's behavior by attributing causes of that behavior to either something in themselves or a trait they have, called a **dispositional attribution**, or to something outside the person called a **situational attribution**. In this section we will address dispositional reasons why people aggress and in Section 10.4 we will cover situational factors.

#### 10.3.1. Instinct Theory – Prewired to Aggress?

At times, a person or animal will respond in predictable ways to certain stimuli or as ethologists call it an **instinct**. Instincts are inborn and inherited such as with the phenomena of

*imprinting* observed by Konrad Lorenz. He noted that young geese will follow the first moving object they sense after birth. Though this is usually their mother, it may not be in all cases.

Human beings do not possess this specific instinct. The **instinct theory of motivation** states that all of our activities, thoughts, and desires are biologically determined or evolutionarily programmed through our genes and this serve as our source of motivation. William McDougall (1871-1938) stated that humans are wired to attend to stimuli that are important to our goals, move toward the goal such as walking to the refrigerator, and finally we have the drive and energy between our perception of a goal and then movement towards it.

On the other hand, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) believed motivation centered on instinctual impulses reaching consciousness and exerting pressure which, much like strain, is uncomfortable and leads to motivated behavior. Freud identified two types of instincts - 1) life instincts or *Eros* including hunger, thirst, sex, self-preservation and the survival of the species, and all the creative forces that sustain life; and 2) death instincts or *Thanatos* which are destructive forces that can be directed inward as masochism or suicide or outward as hatred and aggression. When these instincts create pressure, it is interpreted as pain and its satisfaction or reduction results in pleasure. Our ultimate goal, or pleasure, is to minimize the excitation/pressure.

Sexual and aggressive instincts tend to be repressed in the unconscious due to societal norms against their expression which could result in some type of punishment or anxiety. Still, they need to be satisfied to reduce the pressure they exert and some ways Freud said this could be done was through humor containing aggressive or sexual themes or dreams. In the case of dreaming, the censorship relaxes during sleep but is not removed and so impulses do enter the content of dreams but are disguised. Despite the disguise, we can still satisfy many of our urges



(i.e. dreams with sexual content). Freud proposed that another way we can release aggression is through what he called **displacement**, or when we channel a feeling or thought to a substitute target because we cannot aggress against the primary target either due to social norms, laws, or it is not accessible to us. For instance, we all have been upset at our boss before. Instead of lashing out on them, we instead go home and engage in aggressive behavior to our significant other and possibly our children. It could be that we are upset at not receiving our financial aid and so do not have the textbooks we need for the first week of class. We cannot lash out at our university or wherever the funds are supposed to come from, so we take out our frustration on our roommate. Or maybe we are upset about social injustices perpetrated by our government. There is really no one specifically we can aggress against in this situation (lack of access) and so we aggress against those around us who are easy targets and available.

Another perspective on instincts comes from American psychologist, William James (1842-1910) who was influential on the Functionalist school of thought in Psychology. Essentially, functionalism said that any structure or function that existed today, did so because it served an adaptive advantage to the organism, demonstrating the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution on our field. James agreed with this and suggested the existence of 37 instincts. These include parental love, jealousy, sociability, play, curiosity, fear, sympathy, vocalization, and imitation. James begins Chapter 24 of his book, *The Principles of Psychology*, by saying, "INSTINCT is usually defined as the faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance." Instincts aid in self-preservation, defense, or care for eggs and young, according to James.

Interestingly, the founder of the school of thought called Behaviorism, John B. Watson (1878-1958), initially accepted the idea of instincts and proposed 11 of them associated with

behavior. That said, in 1929 he came to reject this notion and instead argued that instincts are socially conditioned responses and in fact, the environment is the cause of all behavior.

Finally, we are sometimes motivated by forces outside conscious awareness or what is called **unconscious motivation**. For Freud (1920), awareness occurs when motives enter *consciousness*, the focus of awareness, from either the *preconscious*, defined as the part of a person's psyche that contains all thoughts, feelings, memories, and sensations; or the *unconscious*, defined as the part of a person's psyche not readily available to them. It is here that repressed thoughts and instinctual impulses are kept. For information to pass from the unconscious to the preconscious it must pass a censor or gate keeper of sorts. Any mental excitations that make it to the gate/door and are turned away are said to be **repressed**. Even when mental events are allowed through the gate, they may not be brought into awareness. For that to occur, the eye of the conscious must become aware of them. Could it be then that we are frustrated with some situation or person and are not aware of it?

### 10.3.2. Genetic and Endocrine/Nervous Systems Explanations

**10.3.2.1. Brain areas.** One area of the brain that has been implicated in aggression is the amygdala which is responsible for emotion. For instance, Matthies et al. (2012) found that participants with higher aggression scores as measured through the Life History of Aggression Assessment (LHA) had a 16-18% reduction of amygdala volumes, indicating a significant negative correlation of trait aggression and amygdala volume. A similar study found that men with lower amygdala volume displayed higher levels of aggressive behavior and psychopathic features from childhood to adulthood (Pardini, Raine, Erickson, & Loeber, 2014). Finally, exaggerated amygdala reactivity was reported to faces expressing anger in subjects diagnosed

with intermittent explosive disorder (IED), which is characterized by reactive aggressive behavior (Coccaro, McCloskey, Fitzgerald, & Phan, 2007).

The hypothalamus has also been indicated in aggressive behavior in mice (Lin et al., 2011), rats (Spiteri et al., 2010; Panksepp, 1971), hamsters (Ferris et al., 1997), cats (Romaniuk, 1965), sparrows (Mukai et al., 2009), and humans (Haller, 2013).

**10.3.2.2. The role of testosterone.** The hormone, testosterone, when present in high levels, as well as a large body mass, were shown to lead to greater levels of social dominance and physical aggression in adolescents, especially in situations where physical aggression leads to social dominance (Tremblay, 1998). In another study, 30 male college students provided a saliva sample so that testosterone level could be assessed and then either interacted with a gun or a child's toy for 15 minutes. After this another saliva sample was provided. They then added as much hot sauce to a cup of water that they wanted to, believing that another subject would have to drink it. The researchers found that males who interacted with the gun had greater increases in testosterone level and added more hot sauce to the water than did participants who interacted with the toy (Klinesmith, Kasser, & McAndrew, 2006).

**10.3.2.3. Heritability of childhood aggression.** Porch et al. (2016) utilized two large twin cohorts and found that heritability of aggressive behavioral problems was high, between 50 and 80% in the two samples. For both samples, the shared environment accounts for about 20% of the variation in aggression across all ages. Of course, parent report bias could be what is driving such high genetics effects, though a more recent review states that studies utilizing non-parent raters are coming to similar conclusions (DiLalla, 2017). The exact relationship between genes and environment really depends on the type of aggression studied too.

**10.3.2.4. Other mechanisms of aggression.** Nelson and Trainor (2007) published a review that identified several mechanisms for aggression as follows. First, they point out that hypothalamic and limbic brain regions facilitate aggressive behavior but that neural activity in the frontal cortex can inhibit it. Second, the neurotransmitter, serotonin, regulates aggressive behavior, and its release, reuptake, and sensitivity can be modified to affect such behavior. Third, dopamine is necessary for aggressive behavior through arousal, learning, and/or memory. Fourth, aggressive behavior can be increased in humans through mutations in the monoamine oxidase A (MAOA) enzyme (Meyer-Lindenberg et al., 2006). Fifth, genetic mutations or hormones that increase aggression in one environment do not necessarily increase it in another, indicating a gene-environment interaction.

### **10.3.3. Personality and Aggression – A Dark Triad?**

There are some people who are willing to use others for their own gain. How do we explain such behavior? Psychologists use personality as one such explanation for aggressive behavior, and three traits in particular, called the **Dark Triad**, are important – Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). First, **narcissism** involves our tendency to seek admiration and special treatment. Those high in the trait are self-focused and not other-focused, show a great deal of self-love, and have low empathy for others. Second, **Machiavellianism** is a trait reflecting a person's willingness to manipulate others. Third, **psychopathy** refers to a person's tendency to be callous and insensitive, impulsive, and to exert poor self-control. Paulhus and Williams (2002) write, "To varying degrees, all three entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness" (pg. 557).

The Dark Triad has been measured through a brief measure called the “Dirty Dozen” (DD) scale which has four items per trait or 12 total (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Recent research suggests this scale is too short and some essential content may have been removed to obtain the brief version, such as being too narrow in assessing interpersonal antagonism by leaving out dishonesty, immodesty, and noncompliance; and there being no attempt to capture disinhibition (Miller et al., 2012). Another brief measure has been introduced by Jones and Paulhus (2013) called the Short Dark Triad (SD3) to assess dark personality traits. Building off the limitations of the DD, it assesses each trait through 9 items for 27 total and uses a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicates the person disagrees strongly to 5 or agrees strongly. Across four studies the authors found that the SD3 “achieves an optimal compromise between instrument brevity and respectable reliability and validity” (pg. 10). To measure Machiavellianism, questions such as ‘It’s not wise to tell your secrets,’ ‘It’s wise to keep track of information that you can use against people later,’ and ‘Most people can be manipulated’ are used. To measure Narcissism, ‘People see me as a natural leader,’ ‘I like to get acquainted with important people,’ and ‘I insist on getting the respect I deserve’ are used. Finally, Psychopathy is measured through ‘Payback needs to be quick and nasty,’ ‘People who mess with me always regret it,’ and ‘I’ll say anything to get what I want’ to name a few. Maples, Lamkin, and Miller (2014) pitted the DD against the SD3 in a community sample of 287 participants and found that the SD3 proved to be the stronger scale and better measured the dark triad personality traits.

#### **10.3.4. Negative Affect and Mood**

Another possible dispositional factor on aggression is negative affect and mood. In a study of 49 participants in a treatment program for child physical abuse, researchers found that

negative affect contributed to parent-to-child aggression (PTCA) in the form of minor physical violence but not severe physical violence and that PTCA has qualities of impulsive aggression which is believed to be driven by negative affect, is not planned, and often occurs in response to aversive events. As such, the authors suggest that physically abusive parents may benefit from interventions that promote positive emotion-focused coping strategies (Mammen, Kolko, & Pilkonis, 2002). In another study, participants who placed their nondominant hand in cold water as they administered either a reward or punishment to a fellow student and were told that they might experience pain reported greater discomfort; were more annoyed, angered, and irritated; and were more punitive to the available target (the other student) even though this person was not the cause of their discomfort (Berkowitz & Thome, 1987).

#### **10.3.5. Hostile Attribution Bias and Aggression Schemas**

The **hostile attribution bias** leads people to project blame onto others and is an extra-punitive mentality (Adams & John, 1997), while **negative reciprocity beliefs** are an individual's proclivity to reciprocate negative treatment for negative treatment or to take an eye for an eye (Eisenberger et al., 2004). In a study of workplace incivility and interpersonal deviance, Wu et al. (2014) found that when employees high in the hostile attribution bias categorize incivility as hostile, they will return interpersonal deviance. Those low in the bias do not respond to incivility in a negative manner. Also, those holding strong negative reciprocity beliefs will reciprocate mistreatment with mistreatment if they perceive hostile intent, while those low in the belief do not respond this way even if they believe 'eye for an eye' is an appropriate social norm. The presence of a three-way interaction (between workplace incivility, hostile attribution bias, and negative reciprocity beliefs) suggests that both constructs are necessary to predict an employee's

interpersonal deviance. The authors write, “Individuals with strong hostile attribution bias and negative reciprocity beliefs are most influenced by workplace incivility because they are inclined to categorize uncivil behaviors as hostile and make a decision to reciprocate interpersonal deviance” (pg. 196).

Recall from Section 3.1.2. that as we gather information from our world, we organize it in a way that we can obtain it again when needed. One way we do this is through the creation of *schemas*, or organized ways of making sense of our experience. As we can have schemas for the self, roles, events, groups, or persons, it should not be surprising to learn that we can develop schemas about aggression. Our **aggression schemas** provide us information about when aggression may be appropriate and the form it should take. This information comes from the society we live in through social norms, is learned in ways to be described in Section 10.4.2, and can be affected by arousal, the media, domestic violence, etc. We will cover all of these topics in due time.

**Dehumanization** is when we view an individual as not having human qualities or being less human. We might call these people ‘animals,’ ‘cockroaches,’ or ‘vermin.’ Defining a person through a single characteristic such as diabetic, alcoholic, or addict dehumanizes them also. We could also engage in what is called **victim-blaming**, or when shift focus from the perpetrator and taint the target of violence. We might say, ‘You made me do it.’ Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that when men associated women with primitive constructs such as animals or instinct, they were more willing to rape or sexually harass them. Greitmeyer and McLatchie (2011) found that playing violent video games increased dehumanization which led to higher levels of aggressive behavior. They state that video-game-induced aggressive behavior occurs when victimizers view the victim as less than human.

### 10.3.6. Rumination

**Rumination** is when we constantly think about something. In terms of aggression, we may dwell on some affront made against us, such as an insult or physical attack. Research shows that rumination increases the chances of engaging in aggressive behavior. For instance, participants who were made to ruminate for 25 minutes over a provocation were more aggressive toward a fumbling confederate than distracted participants. The participants showed displaced aggression to a minor annoyance (Bushman et al., 2005). Another study found that ruminating on an anger-inducing provocation reduces self-control and can lead to increased aggression (Denson et al., 2011).

### 10.3.7. Arousal

Have you ever been driving to work and nearly had an accident? This likely upset you and caused heightened arousal. But you also likely remained aroused for a period of time after this event, and then once you made it to work, may have snapped at a colleague due to some frustration such as them not submitting a report to you or failing to reply to an email. This idea is called the **excitation-transfer theory** and states that physiological arousal dissipates slowly, such that we may still be slightly aroused as we move from an initial situation that caused an increase in arousal to subsequent situations. We detect a stimulus in our environment, experience arousal due to it, and subsequently experience a more intense emotional reaction than we may normally to another stimulus. Have you ever tried to beat the end boss in a video game and just could not do it for whatever reason? If a friend makes a snide comment about your inability, you will likely snap at them in anger and storm out of the room. Zillman, Katcher, and Milavsky (1972) used a 2x2 factorial design (factor one – low vs. high aggressive instigation; factor two –



low vs. high sympathetic arousal due to physical exercise) and measured subsequent aggressive behavior (DV) through the intensity of a shock delivered to the earlier instigator. Results showed that the shock was greater if the instigation was high initially and if there was residual sympathetic nervous system activation. Residual excitation led to greater levels of subsequent aggressiveness if the instigation was high.

## 10.4. Why We Aggress – Situational Factors

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define culture of honor and describe research related to it.
- Describe socialization of aggression from a learning theory perspective.
- Describe the frustration-aggression hypothesis and whether it has received empirical support.
- Clarify the role of social rejection in aggression.
- Describe research showing the effects of alcohol on aggression,
- Describe research showing the effects of media on aggression.
- Describe research showing the effects of temperature on aggression.
- Describe research showing the effects of crowding on aggression.

### 10.4.1. Culture and Aggression – A Culture of Honor?

In some cultures, individuals are expected to safeguard their reputation, family, or property by answering threats, insults, and affronts with violence. This is called a **culture of honor**. So, what if someone bumps into you as they walk by but calls you an “asshole” (not our word)? Across three experiments, Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwarz (1996) found that for

male University of Michigan students raised in the North, the affront did not affect them. But for students raised in the South, they were more likely to think their masculine reputation or status was at stake in front of others, to be more upset as shown by a rise in the stress hormone cortisol, to show a rise in testosterone indicating they were physiologically ready to aggress, more cognitively primed for aggression, and were more likely to engage in behavior classified as aggressive and dominant on subsequent tasks. The authors state that their results show that a Southern culture of honor exists, but also that their aggressive behavior might be due to the fact that southerners are more polite than northerners and do not experience such rudeness. It may be that culture of honor norms are “socially enforced and perpetuated because they have become embedded in social roles, expectations, and shared definitions of manhood” (pg. 958).

The existence of this southern culture of honor persists today even though the norm is no longer functional. Why is that? One possibility that has received empirical support is that southern males believe their peers endorse and enforce the norms (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008). What about school violence? Could there be differences in states with a culture of honor norm compared to those that do not have the norm? In a study of high school students in which demographic characteristics were controlled for, Brown et al. (2009) found that students from culture of honor states were more likely to have taken a weapon to school in the past month and that these states had more than twice as many school shootings per capita over the past 20 years.

Another study found that in a cross-cultural sample of Turkish and Dutch participants, the former reacted more aggressively to insults than the latter. But the difference was not just linked to gender norms. Instead, the Turk's aggressive behavior was associated with concern for family honor and they stated that they would respond more aggressively to insults. Masculine honor was a factor for both groups when aggression did occur, but could not explain cultural differences in

aggression. In their second study, Turks, Dutch, and Turkish-Dutch participants were included and it was found that the Turkish-Dutch scored in between the Turks and Dutch suggesting the individuals endorsed both sets of norms. The authors write, “Turkish culture is more interdependent than Dutch culture, which could imply that any type of insult in Turkey is an insult to one’s interdependent self, encompassing both the self and relations whereas in the Netherlands, it is an insult to the self only” (pg. 341; van Osch et al., 2013).

#### **10.4.2. Learning Theory**

In Module 9, Section 9.2.2, we discussed the socialization of negative group stereotypes and prejudice. Please review this section as it pertains to how aggression is learned too. Plomin, Foch, and Rowe (1981) conducted a replication and extension of Bandura’s classic Bobo doll study (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) using three key behaviors as dependent measures: number of hits, intensity of hits, and the number of quadrants into which the Bobo doll was struck. The study included 216 twin children but found no evidence of hereditary influence. The environment was determined to be the primary source of individual differences. Recall that in the Bobo doll study, children who watched the aggressive model behaved aggressively with the Bobo doll while those who saw the nice model, played nice, when deprived of the coveted toy. Hence, they displayed the same behavior as the model they observed. As Nathan Heflick writes in a 2011 article for Psychology Today entitled, ‘Children Learn Aggression from Parents,’ “Children learn their behaviors from adults. If we are to have a more peaceful world, it starts with the way adults act around children.” To read the article, please visit:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-big-questions/201111/children-learn-aggression-parents>.

In terms of operant conditioning, positive and negative reinforcement play into the learning of aggressive behavior. Similar to the examples given in Module 9, people might learn that aggressive behavior is good if it helps them obtain what they want (PR). A child uses force to take the toy they want from another child and is happy afterwards, because the toy is fun to play with. In the future, the child will engage in the same behavior to obtain what they want (i.e. instrumental aggression). In terms of negative reinforcement, if someone is harassing or bullying us, we may finally have enough and aggress against them. If the bullying stops, we will be more likely to engage in aggressive behavior in the future when we are bullied (i.e. hostile aggression).

### 10.4.3. Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

Have you ever been unable to complete a task, had to wait for some needed resource, was upset because things didn't go the way you wanted them too, or was interrupted in your pursuit of a goal in some way? Of course, we all have and this is the essence of what is called **frustration**, or when a person is prevented from reaching a goal because something or someone stands in the way. If your favorite team has a stellar season but gets to the championship game and loses, this can be very frustrating. What if as you are leaving the stadium the opposing team's fans are gloating and maybe even heckling you and your fellow fans. What might you do? Of course you can just walk away and ignore them. But according to Dollard and colleagues (1939) you are likely to aggress. This is the essence of what has come to be called the **frustration-aggression hypothesis** or the idea that the occurrence of frustration always leads to aggression and this aggression is caused by our being frustrated. In fact, the more salient a goal is for us, the more frustrated we will become when attempts to acquire it are thwarted. The frustration causes a drive to aggress and acting out reduces the drive and restores equilibrium.

Here's the issue. We cannot always aggress against the source of our frustration. Recall our earlier conversation of *displacement* in Section 10.3.1, or when we channel a feeling or thought to a substitute target because we cannot aggress against the primary target either due to social norms, laws, or it is not accessible to us. As noted above, we cannot punch our boss for reprimanding us in front of coworkers for something that was his mistake, so we go home and holler at our spouse and children.

The hypothesis stood for about 50 years despite mixed results in laboratory investigations. In fact, in 1941, just two years after its publication, Neal Miller, one of the authors of the original study, proposed that frustration always causing aggression is misleading and instead, it should be said that "frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of response, one of which is an instigation to some form of aggression" (Miller, 1941).

In a review of the Dollard et al. (1939) theory, Berkowitz (1989) offered two "friendly amendments" to the original conception of frustration-aggression before moving into criticisms. First, he says that their supposition "seems to neglect the possibility that aggression can be learned instrumental behavior" (pg. 62) and second that they assume that "aggression was always primarily aimed at doing harm" (pg. 62). Berkowitz says these issues fail to distinguish between instrumental and hostile aggression, and only focus on hostile, "forgetting that instrumental aggression can be learned much as other instrumental behaviors are learned" (pg. 62). He instead proposes that aversive events often cause high levels of aggressive behavior and that any kind of negative affect can produce aggression and anger. This might include physical pain, psychological discomfort, hot weather, crowding, social rejection, or our team losing the championship game. He states:

Frustrations are aversive events and generate aggressive inclinations only to the extent that they produce negative affect. An unanticipated failure to obtain an attractive goal is more unpleasant than an expected failure, and it is the greater displeasure in the former case that gives rise to the stronger instigation to aggression. Similarly, the thwarted persons' appraisals and attributions presumably determine how bad they feel at not getting what they had wanted so that they are most aggressively inclined when they experience strong negative affect (Berkowitz, 1989, pg. 71)

Interestingly, a 2015 article assessing the impact of video game play on player aggression focused on the social context of gaming and not just the game content as most studies have done. The effects of game outcome and trash-talking were examined in a sample of 75 participants. Results showed that the unfavorable outcome, not trash-talking by an opponent, can increase postgame aggression and that this is mediated by negative affect (Breuer, Scharkow, & Quandt, 2015).

#### **10.4.4. Social Rejection**

Human beings have a fundamental need to belong and when it cannot be fulfilled or is thwarted, this is painful and could be detrimental to health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). We might expect that if a person is socially rejected, they could display greater levels of aggression. Twenge and Campbell (2003) found this to be true, but when social rejection was coupled with having high levels of narcissism. Across four studies, narcissists were angrier at, and aggressed more, against someone who rejected them, but also innocent third parties. Interestingly, we

might wonder if self-esteem predicts aggression after being socially rejected but the researchers found that it did not. Peer rejection and aggression in early childhood is also a predictor of later conduct disorder (Miller-Johnson et al., 2002).

The perception of groupness, or as Campbell (1958) called it “entitativity,” states that aggregates of people vary in terms of how much they are perceived as a cohesive whole. For example, people in line for the bathroom at a baseball game are not as cohesive as a football team is. Across two experiments, Gaertner, Iuzzini, and O’Mara (2008) investigated the hypothesis that both social rejection and perceived groupness are involved in multiple-victim incidents of aggression such as the Columbine High School massacre and the mass shooting at Virginia Tech. Their results showed that participants who experienced groupness in a three-person aggregate *and* rejection by one member subsequently behaved more aggressively against the whole aggregate as well as showed less favorable affective associations toward the group, than those who did not experience both groupness and rejection. They speculate, “Perceived groupness activates processes of transference and depersonalization by which the rejectee integrates the rejection experience into his/her prototype of the group and subsequently generalizes the rejection to all group members.” Of course, the implications of this are dire.

Check out the article for yourself by visiting:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103108000267#bib4>

#### **10.4.5. Alcohol Use and Aggression**

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1997 to 2008 alcohol was a factor in between 19% and 37% of violent crimes ([https://www.bjs.gov/content/acf/ac\\_conclusion.cfm](https://www.bjs.gov/content/acf/ac_conclusion.cfm)).

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health reports that each year in the United States, there are 7,756 homicides attributable to alcohol and 1,269 of these occur in persons under the age of 21. Data also shows that 48% of homicide offenders drank right before the murder and 37% were intoxicated during the murder. They note, “Research supports that alcohol advertising plays a role in causing sexual violence, independent of the racial/ethnic composition, social and economic characteristics, population, residential stability, poverty, and alcohol availability of the neighborhood where the advertisements are displayed.” For more on the report, please visit: <http://www.camy.org/resources/fact-sheets/alcohol-violence/index.html>.

So, does alcohol cause aggression? Bushman (2002) proposed three possible reasons why it might. One theory is that people experience a **disinhibition** or reduction of our control such that the part of the brain that under normal conditions inhibits aggressive tendencies is anesthetized by alcohol. As Muehlberger (1956) points out, alcohol leads to aggression not by “stepping on the gas” but by “paralyzing the brakes” (pg. 40). Also, we expect that those who are intoxicated will behave aggressively and so they can “blame the bottle” for any aggressive behaviors they make. Finally, aggression under the influence of alcohol occurs because our intellectual functioning is impaired, we make inaccurate assessment of risks, and we experience a reduction in self-awareness (Bushman, 2002). The results from his study show that intoxicated participants were more aggressive compared to sober individuals but that pharmacological (i.e. disinhibition) and expectancy effects of alcohol are not solely to blame. Instead, alcohol was shown to indirectly cause aggression through changes within the person. Provocations, frustrations, and aggressive cues had a stronger effect on intoxicated than sober participants and may explain why “barroom brawls” occur so frequently (Bushman, 2002).



#### 10.4.6. The Media

According to the Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, formed in 1969, and a follow-up report by the National Institute of Mental Health in 1982, viewing violence on television may cause children to become less sensitive to the pain of others, fearful of the world around them, and behave in aggressive ways toward others. Exposure to media violence can **desensitize** people to violence in the real world (Krahe et al., 2011) and for some, it can become an enjoyable experience and not cause the anxiety that would be expected from viewing such material. Empathy and emotional reactivity are also shown to be diminished (Mrug, Madan, Cook, & Wright, 2015).

A meta-analysis was conducted to test the effects of violent video games on aggression and found that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive cognition, affect, and behavior, and decreases empathy and prosocial behavior (Anderson et al., 2010). The authors propose that since the effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior is clear, the public policy debate should focus on how to best deal with this risk factor and public education could be useful. They conclude, “It is true that as a player you are “not just moving your hand on a joystick” but are indeed interacting “with the game psychologically and emotionally.” It is not surprising that when the game involves rehearsing aggressive and violent thoughts and actions, such deep game involvement results in antisocial effects on the player. Of course, the same basic social–cognitive processes should also yield prosocial effects when game content is primarily prosocial” (pg. 171). Currently, there are few games on the market with main characters modeling helpful behavior and having zero violent content though research has shown that prosocial games can increase cooperation and helping behavior (Greitemeyer & Mugge, 2014). When participants played Halo II cooperatively and not competitively, they engaged in

more tit-for-tat behaviors which is a pattern of behavior that precedes cooperative behavior, leading researchers to state that the social context of the game is more important than the content (Ewoldsen et al., 2012).

An analysis of 304 scenes from popular pornographic videos found that 88.2% contained physical aggression in the form of spanking, gagging, and slapping and 48.7% had verbal aggression mainly in the form of name calling. Most perpetrators were male and the victims were principally female and displayed pleasure or responded neutrally to the aggression (Bridges et al., 2010). So, what are the effects of such depictions? Recent research has shown that pornography use leads to attitudes supporting violence against women but is higher when viewing sexually violent pornography than the nonviolent variant (Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010) and with more frequent use (Malamuth, Hald, & Koss, 2011). In a survey of 489 college males who were members of fraternities at a large public university in the Midwest, it was found that those who viewed pornography (83% of the sample while 27% used sadomasochistic pornography during the past 12 months) were less likely to intervene in potential rape situations, were more likely to rape, and were more likely to believe rape myths (Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011).

For more on media violence and aggressive behavior, please visit the following:

<https://www.apa.org/action/resources/research-in-action/protect>

#### **10.4.7. Temperature**

The weather represents a situational factor that can affect one's likelihood to engage in aggressive behavior. Anderson, Deuser, & DeNeve (1995) found that hot temperatures produced

increases in hostile cognitions, hostile affect, and physiological arousal while reducing general positive affect and our perception of arousal. Thus, hot temperatures can increase aggression due to biased appraisals of ambiguous social events.

#### **10.4.8. Crowding**

Crowding occurs when we do not feel we have sufficient space and can lead to stress. This in turn can lead to aggression as has been shown in studies of nightclubs (Macintyre & Homel, 1997), inpatient psychiatric wards (Nijman et al., 1999), prisons (Lawrence & Andrews, 2004), and neighborhoods (Regoeczi, 2003).

### **10.5. Reducing Aggression**

#### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Outline ways to reduce bullying and cyberbullying.
- Clarify if punishment is an effective way to deter aggression.
- Explain how self-distancing can be used to reduce aggression.
- Clarify the effectiveness of catharsis on reducing aggression.

#### **10.5.1. Bullying Prevention**

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), Dan Olweus (1993) has developed the most comprehensive body of research to date on how to prevent bullying in schools and emphasizes changing the school climate to reduce bullying. Four principles are important. First, the home and school environments should be characterized by warmth, positive regard, and involvement with adults. Second, firm limits against unacceptable

behavior should be established. Third, negative sanctions should be applied if a student breaks a rule and these sanctions should be nonphysical and not hostile. Fourth, all adults in the school need to understand they have a responsibility for creating and maintaining a safe and supportive school climate.

As for specific strategies, they recommend dispelling myths about bullying such as boys will be boys, have clear and enforceable rules and sanctions, determining how serious the problem is at the school through an anonymous questionnaire, have students sign an anti-bullying pledge, allow for the reporting of bullying in different ways, increase adult supervision in areas determined to be problematic from the survey, foster nurturing relationships and friendship patterns within the school and classroom, and be patient as it could take up to three years for the strategies to have their intended effect. They conclude in their document, *Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Information for Educators*, “Embolden the witnesses, who are neither bullies nor victims, to make sure that bullying is not permitted on campus. Once a sense of community and caring is established, students .... will feel empowered and have the support and skills needed to keep it that way.”

As far as cyberbullying goes, NASP says that victims and parents can ask the cyberbully to stop, ignore or block the communications, keep hardcopies of the material and send it to the parents of the bully, file a complaint with the internet company, and contact an attorney and/or the police. To prevent such instances from ever occurring, parents can keep computer(s) within view, talk to kids about their online activities, review online communications from time-to-time and let children know you will do this, develop a parent-child internet use contract, install parental control filtering software, and look for warning signs that a child is being cyberbullied. Educators can implement a threat assessment for any report of cyberbullying, use the same

survey approach as above to determine how pervasive and serious the issue is, and educate the larger school community about preventing and responding to cyberbullying.

For more on bullying prevention from NASP, please visit:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/bullying-prevention>.

You can also examine ways to prevent bullying at school at

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/index.html>.

### **10.5.2. Punishment**

One way to deal with aggression and acts of violence is to punish it. So, does punishment work? As with all things in life, the answer is yes...and no. In other words, there are pros and cons. Let's explore them.

In terms of the pros of punishment, consistency is key. 1) If you punish each and every time the person engages in undesirable or problem behavior, they will stop making the behavior (i.e. speeding). 2) Punishment can also be unquestionably effective and deter some criminals from repeating their crimes. 3) Sometimes, after punishment has been administered a few times, it is not needed any more for the mere threat of it is enough to induce the desired behavior. 4) Severity also does not matter. The mere fact of being punished is enough most times, not all. 5) Finally, you do not have to necessarily experience punishment firsthand. Seeing others punished for engaging in behavior you have considered making can be enough.

As for cons of punishment, 1) it is often administered inappropriately. In a blind rage, people often apply punishment broadly such that it covers all sorts of irrelevant behaviors. Parents take out their frustrations at work on their kids and what would not have upset them much one day, angers them immensely another (i.e. displacement). 2) The recipient of the punishment often responds with anxiety, fear, or rage and these emotional side effects generalize to the entire situation. You can see this in animals when they have been punished for soiling the carpet and are disciplined. 3) The effectiveness of punishment is often temporary, depending on the presence of the punishing person or circumstances. When the punisher is not there, the punished misbehaves again. This is captured in the cliché, “When the chiefs away the cat will play.” 4) Most behavior is hard to punish immediately and during the delay behavior may be reinforced several times – i.e. not getting a speeding ticket every time you speed. 5) Punishment conveys little information; it does not tell the person how to act. If you want them to display desirable behavior, they have to know what it is. 6) Finally, an action meant to punish may instead be reinforcing as when a child acts out for attention. For them it is a positive reinforcer. What about the case of the child acting out to get out of math work? In this case the behavior leads to a consequence and specifically negative reinforcement.

So, what is the final verdict on punishment? The list of cons are much more extensive than the list of pros, and the first pro, consistency, is not practical most times leading to the fourth con. This might make us think that punishment is not useful. It can be if the following is practiced:

1. Do not use physical abuse (takes care of Cons 1 and 2).
2. Tell the person how to behave (takes care of Con 5).
3. Reinforce the desired behavior when it occurs.

### 10.5.3. Self-distancing

As shown earlier, rumination after a provocation feeds our anger and can lead to aggressive behavior. One solution is to self-distance and or take a “fly on the wall” perspective. **Self-distancing** occurs when our egocentric experience of a stimulus is reduced (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Mischkowski, Kross, and Bushman (2012) wanted to know if people could do this “in the heat of the moment” and found that when a person self-distanced they had fewer aggressive thoughts and feelings of anger and less aggressive behavior compared to a group who self-immersed or was in the control. Thus, they say that people can self-distance after a provocation and it can reduce aggression. Other research has also shown that self-distancing, not self-immersion, can lead children of all backgrounds to adaptive self-reflection over anger experiences such that they focus less on what happened to them and more on reconstructing their experience (Kross et al., 2012).

### 10.5.4. Catharsis

What if to reduce crime and to stabilize the economy, our government chose to allow citizens to have a 12-hour period wherein all crime was legal, including murder? Sirens would blare to announce the start and stop of what could be an annual holiday, emergency services would be suspended during the time, only the most senior government officials would be granted immunity, and all weapons could be used except the most destructive ones (i.e. grenades, weapons of mass destruction, and biological or chemical agents). Failure to follow these simple rules would result in public hanging. We could even have the emergency broadcast system announce the beginning of this ‘event.’ This event could be used as an act of catharsis for citizens in our great country. Blessed be our New Founding Fathers and America, a nation

reborn.....WAIT..... That's not real, but it is the premise of four movies and a television series under the name, The Purge.

So, can catharsis work to reduce aggressive thoughts and behaviors? In a first study, participants were asked to read a procatharsis message which stated that aggressive behavior can reduce anger and aid with relaxation. Results showed that these participants desired to hit a punching bag more than participants who read an anticatharsis message. In the second study, participants were given the same messages and then actually could hit a punching bag. What would they do if given the chance to engage in laboratory aggression after this? Results showed that the procatharsis group was subsequently more aggressive which contradicts the catharsis hypothesis (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999). Additional research provided similar results (Bushman, 2002)

For more about The Purge, please visit: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2184339/>.

## **Module Recap**

In Module 10 we defined aggression as any behavior, whether physical or verbal, that is carried out with the intent to harm another person. Aggression can be instrumental and focused on obtaining a resource, hostile and intending to harm another, relational and attacking another's relationships, or involve cyberbullying through the use of social media, e-mail, and other online tools. When we think of aggressive acts, crimes like homicide come to mind and the ever-increasing workplace or school violence. But also important are domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, and bullying. So why do people engage in aggressive behavior? When trying to attribute a cause to such behavior we can point a finger at something inside the person that



makes them act aggressive, called a dispositional attribution, or something outside them, or a situational attribution. We explored several reasons under each. For example, rumination, instincts, mood, personality, and arousal are considered dispositional reasons while one's culture, alcohol, the media, socialization, crowding, and temperature are situational factors on aggression. With these issues addressed we proposed ways to reduce bullying, offer punishment and the threat of it as a deterrence to violence, focused on self-distancing, and proposed experiencing catharsis could reduce aggression.

Module 10 is the first of three modules discussing ways we relate to others. It followed on the heels of the prejudice module and for logical reasons. We close out this book on a more positive note – our decision to help others in Module 11 and interpersonal attraction in Module 12. We hope you enjoy these final topics.

## Part IV. How We Relate to Others

# Module 11: Helping Others

## **Module 11: Helping Others**

### **Module Overview**

In Module 11 we move away from discussions of aggressive behavior, prejudice and discrimination covered in preceding modules, and talk about a more positive topic – prosocial behavior. We start by contrasting prosocial, altruistic, and egotistical behavior and then move to an evolutionary explanation for prosocial behavior. From this we cover dispositional or personal reasons why someone may help (or not) to include personal responsibility, time pressures, personality, self-conscious emotions, religiosity, feeling good, gender, empathy, and egotism. Next up are situational reasons to include the bystander effect, the decision-making process related to helping, and social norms. We end with ways to increase helping behavior.

### **Module Outline**

- 11.1. Defining Prosocial Behavior
- 11.2. Why We Help – Dispositional Factors
- 11.3. Why We Help – Situational Factors
- 11.4. Increasing Helping Behavior

### **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Differentiate prosocial, altruistic, and egotistical behavior.
- Clarify if there is an evolutionary precedent for helping behavior.
- Outline dispositional reasons for why people help or do not.
- Outline situational reasons for why people help or do not.
- Strategize ways to increase helping behavior.

## 11.1. Defining Prosocial Behavior

### Section Learning Objectives

- Define prosocial behavior.
- Clarify the difference with altruistic behavior.
- Contrast prosocial and egotistical behavior.
- Explain how evolutionary psychology might approach the development of helping behavior.
- Differentiate kin selection and reciprocal altruism.

#### 11.1.1. Defining Terms

As a child, most of us learn to help an old lady across the street. First responders feverishly work to free trapped miners. Soldiers risk their own safety to pull a wounded comrade off the battlefield. Firefighters and police officers rush inside a burning building to help rescue trapped residents all while cognizant of the building's likelihood to collapse on them. People pull over to help a stranded motorist or one involved in a car accident. And normal everyday people make tough decisions to take a little less of a valued commodity or give a little more so a public good can be provisioned. These are all examples of what is called prosocial behavior. Simply put, **prosocial behavior** is any act we willingly take that is meant to help others, whether the 'others' are a group of people or just one person. The key is that these acts are voluntary and not forced upon the helper. The motive for the behavior is not important. This is different from **altruistic behavior**, in which we choose to help another person voluntarily and with no expectation of reward or acknowledgement. If we make a life saving organ or blood donation and ask never to be identified, the act is altruistic. Whereas if we do not mind if the person

knows, the act would be considered prosocial. The intention of the helping behavior is what is key.

Likely, the opposite of prosocial behavior is what is called **egotistical behavior**, or behavior focused on the self. According to dictionary.com, egotistic refers to behaviors that are vain, boastful, and selfish. Individuals like to talk about themselves and are indifferent to the well-being of others. The Merriam-Webster dictionary online adds that egotistical individuals are overly concerned with their own needs, desires, and interests.

### 11.1.2. An Evolutionary Precedent for Prosocial Behavior?

So, is the desire to help others an inborn tendency, or is it learned through socialization by caregivers and our culture? We will first discuss whether helping behavior could be the product of nature, not nurture. **Evolutionary psychology** is the subfield of psychology which uses changes in genetic factors over time due to the principle of natural selection to explain helping behavior. Charles Darwin noted that behaving in an altruistic way can prevent an organism from passing on its genes and so surviving. Being selfish pays while altruism does not, so then why has altruistic/prosocial behavior evolved? In the *Descent of Man* (1874, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Darwin writes:

It has often been assumed that animals were in the first place rendered social, and that they feel as a consequence uncomfortable when separated from each other, and comfortable whilst together; but it is a more probable view that these sensations were first developed, in order that those animals

which would profit by living in society, should be induced to live together, in the same manner as the sense of hunger and the pleasure of eating were, no doubt, first acquired in order to induce animals to eat. The feeling of pleasure from society is probably an extension of the parental or filial affections, since the social instinct seems to be developed by the young remaining for a long time with their parents; and this extension may be attributed in part to habit, but chiefly to natural selection. With those animals which were benefited by living in close association, the individuals which took the greatest pleasure in society would best escape various dangers, whilst those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers.

Source: <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Darwin/Descent/descent4.htm>

According to ethologists and behavioral ecologists, altruism takes on two forms. First, **kin selection**, also known as *inclusive fitness theory*, states that any behavior aiding a genetic relative will be favored by natural selection (Wilson, 2005). Why is that? Though our own ability to pass our genes to offspring may be compromised, our relative shares those same genes and so indirectly we are passing on our genes. An example is putting the welfare of our children ahead of our own. Most would have no issue with this and I always find it interesting how on an airplane we are reminded that in the event of an emergency, we should put our *own* oxygen mask on first *before* helping others. This especially relates to our wanting to help our kids but if we are able to get their mask on before our own, and then we pass out, we really are not helping them at all. It's best then

to make sure we are conscious and then help them out so that we can be with them in the event of a crash. Still, it seems selfish to do this in light of kin selection.

Next is **reciprocal altruism** (Trivers, 1971) and is the basis for long-term cooperative interactions. According to it, an organism acts in a way that benefits others at expense to itself. It does so because it expects that in the future, the recipient of the altruistic act, who does not have to be related to the altruist, will reciprocate assistance. An example of this would be a firefighter. They run into burning buildings to save people at a risk to their own life. They do this with the belief that someone will save them or their family if they are in the same situation. Another possible example would be anytime you help someone in need. The belief is that if you are in need someone will help you. As Ashton et al. (1998) writes, “If the benefits to the recipient of this assistance outweigh the costs to the benefactor, then interactions of this kind, when reciprocated, result in a long-run net gain in chances for survival and reproduction for both individuals.” The authors looked for correlates of kin altruism (selection) and reciprocal altruism and found that for the former empathy and attachment were important, while for the latter forgiveness and non-retaliation mattered most. Kin selection was further related to high agreeableness and low emotional stability while reciprocal altruism (not kin related) was related to high agreeableness and high emotional stability (Ashton et al., 1998).

## **11.2. Why We Help – Dispositional Factors**

### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Clarify how a sense of personal responsibility can lead to helping behavior.
- Clarify why being in a rush may reduce helping behavior.
- Provide evidence for or against an altruistic personality.
- Describe how the self-conscious emotions of embarrassment and guilt may affect helping behavior.
- Clarify whether religiosity is an accurate predictor of helping behavior.
- Describe the effect of mood on helping.
- Clarify whether males or females are more likely to help.
- Explain the role of empathy in helping.
- Clarify whether egotism can lead to helping behavior.

### **11.2.1. Personal Responsibility**

If we sense greater personal responsibility, we will be more likely to help, such as there being no one else around but us. If we see a motorist stranded on the side of the road on an isolated country road, and we know no other vehicle is behind us or approaching, responsibility solely falls on us, and we will be more likely to help. Keep this in mind for when we talk about diffusion of responsibility in a bit.

### **11.2.2. Time Pressure – The Costs of Motivated Behavior**

Stopping to help someone in need takes time and represents a cost of motivated behavior. But what if we are in a rush to get to work or an appointment...or to class. Will we stop?



Research by Batson et al. (1978) says that we will not. In a study utilizing 40 students at a large midwestern university, participants showed up at one location but were told they had to proceed to a different building for the study. Half were told they were late and half were told they were on time. Also, half were told their participation was vital while the other half were told it was not essential. As you might expect those in the unimportant condition stopped to help a confederate slumped in a doorway with his head down and coughing and groaning (Darley and Batson, 1973; Good Samaritan paradigm). Most who were late for their appointment did not stop to help.

### **11.2.3. An Altruistic Personality?**

It would seem logical to assume that personality affects the decision to engage in helping behavior and we might hypothesize that moral behavior might be related to altruistic behavior. We would be wrong. In a classic study, Hartshorne and May (1929) found that the correlation of types of helping behavior and moral behavior was only 0.23 in a sample of 10,000 elementary and high school children. Subsequent research has also questioned whether such a construct is viable (Bierhoff & Rohmann, 2004) and Batson (1987) argued that prosocial motivation is actually egotistical when the goal is to increase one's own welfare but altruistic when the goal is to increase the welfare of another person. Kerber (1984) found that those who could be classified as altruistic did examine the costs-benefits of engaging in helping behavior, though they viewed these situations as more rewarding and less costly than those low in altruism.

More recently, Dovidio et al. (2006) concluded that there truly is a 'prosocial personality' and that differences in the trait vary with the action a specific situation calls for such as rescuing people who are in danger, to serving as a volunteer, and to helping an individual in distress.

Carlo et al. (2009) point out that gaps in the study of altruism exist and need to be studied to

include changes in altruistic traits and behaviors over time, how altruism develops in childhood and adolescence, the biological basis of altruism, and cross-cultural and broader social contextual factors beyond proximal socializing agents of altruism. They conclude, “A focus on the positive aspects of human functioning will facilitate the development of more balanced, comprehensive solutions designed to enhance the personal and environmental factors that promote and foster a more caring, beneficent, and thriving society” (pg. 289).

#### **11.2.4. Self-Conscious Emotions**

We will be more likely to help if we do not expect to experience any type of *embarrassment* when helping. Let’s say you stop to help a fellow motorist with a flat tire. If you are highly competent at changing tires, then you will not worry about being embarrassed. But if you know nothing about tires, but are highly interpersonally attracted to the stranger on the side of the road holding a tire iron with a dumbstruck look on their face, you likely will look foolish if you try to change the tire and demonstrate your ignorance of how to do it (your solution is usually to call your auto club or AAA when faced with the same stressor).

Guilt can be used to induce helping behavior too. In one study, 90 adults received either a positive mood induction or no stimulus followed by a guilt induction, a distraction control, or no stimulus at all. Helping increase in relation to being in a positive mood but also being made to feel guilty. When the guilt induction followed the positive mood induction, there was no increase in helping behavior. In a second experiment, guilt was shown to increase helping only when an obligation to help was stressed (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980).

### 11.2.5. Religiosity

Does religious orientation affect prosocial behavior? According to Hansen, Vandenberg, & Patterson (1995) it does and of the three orientations – intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest – intrinsically oriented individuals prefer nonspontaneous helping opportunities while quest prefer spontaneous helping behaviors. Another study found that higher reports of subjective spirituality were linked to increased prosocial behavior (Bonner, Koven, & Patrick, 2003), though yet another study found evidence of altruistic hypocrisy such that intrinsic and orthodox religion were shown to be related to positive views toward helping others but were inversely related to actual altruistic behavior (Ji, Pendergraft, & Perry, 2006).

Before moving on, it is important to share an interesting article published by NPR in 2016. The article reported the results of a paper by Decety et al. (2015) which showed that in a sample of 1,151 children aged 5 to 12 and from cities in six different countries (i.e. Chicago, Toronto, Cape Town, Istanbul, Izmir, Amman, and Guangzhou) children from non-religious homes were more altruistic than children from Christian and Muslim households. In terms of religions affiliation, 23.9% of the sample were Christian, 43% were Muslim, and 27.6% were not religious. Here's the issue. A re-analysis of the data by Azim Shariff of the University of California, Irvine, found that the original authors failed to consider variation in altruistic behavior that was actually accounted for by country and not religious affiliation. He updated the conclusions and found that country (likely culture) made a difference in altruistic behavior and not religion. Shariff concluded that religion does make people more generous but it is not the only factor, or even the best one. Even non-religious people can be motivated to engage in prosocial behavior.

To read the article for yourself, please visit:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2016/08/15/490031512/does-religion-matter-in-determining-altruism>

### 11.2.6. Feeling Good

It is not surprising to surmise that people in a good mood are more willing to help than those in a bad mood. Maybe we did well on a test, found \$20 on the street, or were listening to uplifting or prosocial music (Greitmeyer, 2009; North, Tarrant, & Hargreaves, 2004). Though more of a situational factor, it should be noted that pleasant ambient odors such as the smell of baking cookies or roasting coffee lead to greater levels of positive affect and subsequent helping behavior (Baron, 1997).

We might also help because we have a need for approval such as we realize by helping save the old lady from the burning building, we could get our name in the paper. This of course could make us feel good about ourselves. Deutsch and Lamberti (1986) found that subjects high in a need for approval were more likely to help a confederate who dropped books if they had been socially rewarded and not punished while those low in the need for approval were unaffected by social reinforcement.

Might a person in a bad mood engage in helping behavior? According to the **negative-state relief model** a person might alleviate their own bad mood and feel better. This relieves their discomfort and improves their mood (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973).

### 11.2.7. Gender

Would you like to make a hypothesis about which gender is more likely to help? If you guessed males, you are correct. If you guessed females, you are correct. It all depends on what the prosocial behavior is. When it comes to being heroic or chivalrous, men are more likely to help, while nurturant expressions of aid are generally engaged in by women (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). In a 2009 study, Eagly found further evidence for gender differences in relation to classes of prosocial behaviors. Women specialize in prosocial behaviors that are communal and relational while men engage in behaviors that are collectively oriented and agentic. The author proposes that these differences are linked to the division of labor and hormones, individual traits, and social expectations mediate how these gender roles influence behavior.

### 11.2.8. Empathy

Before we can understand empathy, we need to distinguish it from sympathy. **Sympathy** is when we feel compassion, pity, or sorry for another due to the hardships they have experienced. **Empathy** is when we put ourselves in another person's shoes and vicariously experience their perspective. In doing so, we can feel sympathy and compassion for them. Batson proposed the **empathy-altruism hypothesis** (Batson et al., 1991) which states that when we feel empathy for a person, we will help them for purely altruistic reasons with no concern about personal gain. If we do not feel empathy for them, then we need to decide whether the benefits of helping outweigh the costs. In one study, 84 female participants were exposed to a person in distress and asked to either observe the victim's reactions (the low empathy condition) or imagine the victim's feelings (the high empathy condition). They also assessed how easy it was for the participant to escape without helping (2 levels – easy or hard). Results showed, and

in keeping with the empathy-altruism hypothesis, that participants low in empathy helped less when escape was easy which led the authors to speculate that they were only trying to reduce their own distress in an egotistical way. Those high in empathy helped no matter how easy escape was. Analysis of the participants self-reported emotional response showed that feeling empathy, not distress, evoked altruistic behavior (Toi & Batson, 1982). The link between personal distress and an egotistic motivation has been found in subsequent research as well (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997).

### 11.2.9. An Egotistical Reason to Help?

Another important strategy is called **social exchange theory** and arose out of the work of George Homans, John Thibaut, Harold Kelly, and Peter Blau from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, though it has undergone revisions since (Cook et al., 2013) to include the addition of emotion (Lawler, 2001; Lawler & Thye, 1999). It is the idea that we utilize a minimax strategy whereby we seek to maximize our rewards all while minimizing our cost. Helping can be costly and so we help only when the gain to us is greater. In social exchange theory, there are no truly altruistic acts. Consider your decision to donate your time to a charity such as at Thanksgiving. Maybe you are considering volunteering at a homeless shelter and giving out food to those in need. You of course will consider the costs of such motivated helping behavior which includes less time with family, less time grazing at the dinner table, being unable to play or watch football, and possibly not having the time to do some shopping and get Black Friday deals. Then there are the benefits of helping which include feeling good about oneself, making a difference in someone else's life, giving something back to your community, and possibly logging community

service hours for your university or fraternity/sorority. If the benefits outweigh the costs, you volunteer. If not, you don't.

Or we might help with an expectation of a specific form of repayment, called **perceived self-interest**. We offer our boss a ride home because we believe he will give us a higher raise when our annual review comes up. Maybe we engage in helping behavior to increase our self-worth. In a way, we have to wonder if it even matters. The recipient of the help is grateful and without it, may have been much worse off. If I am stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire and a stranger stops to help me change it, I really don't care if they are there because they genuinely want to help or because they want to feel better about themselves.

### 11.3. Why We Help – Situational Factors

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify whether the presence of others either facilitates or hinders helping behavior.
- Outline the five-step process for how we decide whether to help or not.
- Describe the effect of social norms on helping behavior.

#### 11.3.1. Bystander Effect

As we saw in Section 11.2.1, if we are the only one on the scene (or at least one of a very small few) we will feel personal responsibility and help. But what if we are among a large group of people who could help. Will you step up then? You still might, but the **bystander effect** (Latane & Darley, 1970) says likely not. Essentially, the chances that we will aid someone needing help decreases as the number of bystanders increases. The phenomenon draws its name from the murder of Ms. Kitty Genovese in March 1964. Thirty-eight residents of New York City failed to aid the 28-year-old woman who was attacked and stabbed twice by Winston Moseley as she walked to her building from her car. Not surprisingly, she called for help which did successfully scare Winston away, but when no one came out to help her, despite turning on lights in their apartments and looking outside, he returned to finish what he started. Ms. Genovese later died from her wounds. Very sad but ask yourself, what would you do? Of course, we would say we would help....or we hope that we would but history and research say otherwise.



### 11.3.2. A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping???

Latane and Darley (1970) proposed that there are a series of five steps we follow when deciding whether to render assistance or not. These include noticing an event, interpreting an event as an emergency, assuming responsibility, knowing how to help, and deciding to help. First, we have to notice that an emergency situation is occurring. This seems simple enough but is an important first step. Consider Milgram's (1970) **urban overload hypothesis** which says that high levels of urban stimulation can overload people and produce negative effects on their perception of the city and other residents such that they tune them out. Hence, we may not notice emergency situations when they are occurring.

Second, we need to interpret the event as an emergency. According to Shotland and Huston (1979) an emergency is characterized by something happening suddenly such as an accident, there being a clear threat of harm to a victim, the harm or threat of harm will increase if no one intervenes, the victim cannot defend or help him/herself, and there is not an easy solution to the problem for the victim. *Ambiguity* can make interpretation difficult. Let's say you are driving down the road and see someone pulled on the side. You can see them in the front seat but cannot tell what they are doing. If the situation does not clearly suggest an emergency, you will likely keep driving. Maybe the person was acting responsibly and pulled over to send a text or take a call and is not in need of any assistance at all. Latane and Darley (1968) conducted a study to examine the effects of an ambiguous event on the decision to intervene in an emergency. They predicted, and found, that the sight of nonresponsive others would lead a participant to perceive the event as not serious and bring about no action as compared to when there was a solitary participant in the room.

Third, when others are around, we experience a **diffusion of responsibility** (Darley & Latane, 1968), meaning that we are less likely to assume responsibility. Consider this. If 10 people witness an accident, each person has just 10% responsibility to act. If there are 5 people present, our responsibility is 20%. If 2, 50% and if we are the only person present, 100%. What if 100 people witnessed the accident? We have a 1% responsibility. So in keeping with the bystander effect as the number of people present increase, we will be less likely to act possibly because we assume less responsibility. To act, we have to feel personally responsible.

The final steps in the Latane and Darley (1970) model involve weighing the costs and benefits to engaging in helping behavior. We might decide that helping is risky as we could look foolish in front of other witnesses called **audience inhibition** (Latane and Nida, 1981) or we might feel pressured by peers to engage in altruistic behavior such as donating blood or donating money to charity called **reluctant altruism** (Reyniers & Bhalla, 2013; Ferguson, Atsma, de Kort, & Veldhuizen, 2012). Once we have decided to help, we need to figure out what type of assistance will be most useful.

### 11.3.3. Social Norms and Culture

Consider the idea of the **reciprocity norm** (Gouldner, 1960) which states that we are more likely to survive if we enter into an understanding with our neighbor to help in times of need. If we help a friend move into their new apartment, we expect help from this individual when we move our next time. The norm is strongest when we are interacting with another person of equal status.

The **norm of social responsibility**, in contrast, states that we should help another person without any concern about future exchange. For instance, a parent cares for a child

and a teacher instructs students. We might wonder if there are cultural differences in regards to this norm, particularly as it relates to collectivist and individualist cultures. Consider that collectivistic cultures have an interdependent view of the self while individualistic cultures have an independent view, and so we expect the former to engage in helping behavior more than the latter. Its not that simple though. Our discussion of in and out groups in Module 4 and again in Module 9 show that we will be more likely to help an ingroup member than an outgroup member. How strongly we draw a distinction between these groups can affect helping behavior. Collective cultures may make a firmer distinction between in and out groups and so help ingroup members more compared to individualistic cultures.

## **11.4. Increasing Helping Behavior**

### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Describe how modeling could be used to increase helping behavior.
- Outline reasons to volunteer.

### **11.4.1. Modeling Helping Behavior**

One way to increase prosocial behavior comes from observational learning and the idea of copying a prosocial model. According to research by Schuhmacher, Koster, and Kartner (2018) when infants observed a prosocial model, they engaged in more helping behavior than if they had no model. Schuhmacher states, "These findings tell us that children's prosocial development may be affected not only by direct and active structuring of helping situations by

others, as when parents offer suggestions to babies to help someone, but also through learning by observing people who help others” (See Science Daily for more information on this article -

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180417130053.htm>.

#### 11.4.2. Reasons to Volunteer

Clary and Snyder (1999) proposed five motivations for volunteerism. First, they suggest that people volunteer due to *values* and a desire to express or act on values such as humanitarianism. Second, *understanding* is critical and people volunteer so that they can exercise underused skills or learn about the world. Third, *enhancement* leads us to engage in volunteer activities so that we can grow and develop psychologically. Fourth, our *career* may lead us to volunteer so we gain career-related experience. Fifth is *social* or volunteering so that we can strengthen our social relationships. Finally, we volunteer to reduce feelings of guilt or to escape personal problems as a *protective* function. The authors used these functions to create the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI).

For additional reasons to volunteer, please read the Psychology Today article. Additional reasons include living longer, benefiting society, and giving a sense of purpose or meaning in life (Klein, 2016).

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-third-age/201403/5-reasons-why-you-should-volunteer>

**Module Recap**

Module 11 covered the important, and more positive topic, of helping behavior. Of course, though prosocial behavior is generally a good thing, understanding reasons why someone may willingly choose not to help can be hard to process. We focused on a series of dispositional and situational factors and then proposed ways to increase helping. With this module now finished, we end the class on an equally important, and definitely more positive, topic of attraction.

## Part IV. How We Relate to Others

# Module 12: Attraction

## **Module 12: Attraction**

### **Module Overview**

It was important to end the book on a positive note. So much of what is researched in social psychology has a negative connotation to it such as social influence, persuasion, prejudice, and aggression. Hence, we left attraction to the end. We start by discussing the need for affiliation and how it develops over time in terms of smiling, play, and attachment. We will discuss loneliness and how it affects health and the related concept of social rejection. We will then discuss eight factors on attraction to include proximity, familiarity, beauty, similarity, reciprocity, playing hard to get, and intimacy. The third section will cover types of relationships and love. Finally, relationship issues are a part of life and so we could not avoid a discussion of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. No worries. We end the module, and book, with coverage of the beneficial effects of forgiveness.

### **Module Outline**

- 12.1. The Need for Affiliation
- 12.2. Factors on Attraction
- 12.3. Types of Relationships
- 12.4. Predicting the End of a Relationship

## **Module Learning Outcomes**

- Describe the need for affiliation and the negative effects of social rejection and loneliness.
- Clarify factors that increase interpersonal attraction between two people.
- Identify types of relationships and the components of love.
- Describe the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse as they relate to relationship conflicts, how to resolve them, and the importance of forgiveness.

### **12.1. The Need for Affiliation**

#### **Section Learning Objectives**

- Define interpersonal attraction.
- Define the need for affiliation.
- Report what the literature says about the need for affiliation.
- Define loneliness and identify its types.
- Describe smiling and how it relates to affiliation.
- Describe play and how it relates to affiliation.
- Define attachment.
- List and describe the four types of attachment.
- Clarify how attachment to parent leads to an attachment to God.
- Describe the effect of loneliness on health.
- Describe social rejection and its relation to affiliation.



### 12.1.1. Defining Key Terms

Have you ever wondered why people are motivated to spend time with some people over others, or why they chose the friends and significant others they do? If you have, you have given thought to **interpersonal attraction** or showing a preference for another person (remember, inter means between and so interpersonal is between people).

This relates to the **need to affiliate/belong** which is our motive to establish, maintain, or restore social relationships with others, whether individually or through groups (McClelland & Koestner, 1992). It is important to point out that we *affiliate* with people who accept us though are generally indifferent while we tend to *belong* to individuals who truly care about us and for whom we have an attachment. In terms of the former, you affiliate with your classmates and people you work with while you belong to your family or a committed relationship with your significant other or best friend. The literature shows that:

- Leaders high in the need for affiliation are more concerned about the needs of their followers and engaged in more transformational leadership due to affiliation moderating the interplay of achievement and power needs (Steinmann, Otting, & Maier, 2016).
- Who wants to take online courses? Seiver and Troja (2014) found that those high in the need for affiliation were less, and that those high in the need for autonomy were more, likely to want to take another online course. Their sample included college students enrolled in classroom courses who had taken at least one online course in the past.
- Though our need for affiliation is universal, it does not occur in every situation and individual differences and characteristics of the target can factor in. One such

difference is religiosity and van Cappellen et al. (2017) found that religiosity was positively related to social affiliation except when the identity of the affiliation target was manipulated to be a threatening out-group member (an atheist). In this case, religiosity did not predict affiliation behaviors.

- Risk of exclusion from a group (not being affiliated) led individuals high in a need for inclusion/affiliation to engage in pro-group, but not pro-self, unethical behaviors (Thau et al., 2015).
- When affiliation goals are of central importance to a person, they perceive the estimated interpersonal distance between them and other people as smaller compared to participants primed with control words (Stel & van Koningsbruggen, 2015).

**Loneliness** occurs when our interpersonal relationships are not fulfilling and can lead to psychological discomfort. In reality, our relationships may be fine and so our *perception* of being alone is what matters most and can be particularly troublesome for the elderly. Tiwari (2013) points out that loneliness can take three forms. First, *situational loneliness* occurs when unpleasant experiences, interpersonal conflicts, disaster, or accidents lead to loneliness. Second, *developmental loneliness* occurs when a person cannot balance the need to relate to others with a need for individualism, which “results in loss of meaning from their life which in turn leads to emptiness and loneliness in that person.” Third, *internal loneliness* arises when a person has low self-esteem and low self-worth and can be caused by locus of control, guilt or worthlessness, and inadequate coping strategies. Tiwari writes, “Loneliness has now become an important public health concern. It leads to pain, injury/loss, grief, fear, fatigue, and exhaustion. Thus, it also makes a person sick and interferes in day to day functioning and hampers recovery.... Loneliness

with its epidemiology, phenomenology, etiology, diagnostic criteria, adverse effects, and management should be considered a disease and should find its place in classification of psychiatric disorders.”

What do you think? Is loneliness a disease, needing to be listed in the DSM?

### 12.1.2. Development of Affiliation and Attachment

**12.1.2.1. Smiling and affiliation.** As early as 6-9 weeks after birth, children smile reliably at things that please them. These first smiles are indiscriminate, smiling at almost anything they find amusing. This may include a favorite toy, mobile over their crib, or even another person. Smiles directed at other people are called *social smiles*. Like smiles directed at inanimate objects, they too are indiscriminate at first but as the infant gets older, come to be reserved for specific people. These smiles fade away if the adult is unresponsive. Smiling is also used to communicate positive emotion and children become sensitive to the emotional expressions of others.

This indiscriminateness of their smiling ties in with how they perceive strangers. Before 6 months of age, they are not upset about the presence of people they do not know. As they learn to anticipate and predict events, strangers cause anxiety and fear. This is called **stranger anxiety**. Not all infants respond to strangers in the same way though. Infants with more experience show lower levels of anxiety than infants with little experience. Also, infants are less concerned about strangers who are female and those who are children. The latter probably has something to do with size as adults may seem imposing to children.

Important to stranger anxiety is the fact that children begin to figure people out or learn to detect emotion in others. They come to discern vocal expressions of emotion before visual ones,

mostly due to their limited visual abilities early on. As vision improves and they get better at figuring people out, **social referencing** emerges around 8-9 months. When a child is faced with an uncertain circumstance or event, such as the presence of a stranger, they will intentionally search for information about how to act from a caregiver. So, if a stranger enters the room, an infant will look to its mother to see what her emotional reaction is. If the mother is happy or neutral, the infant will not become anxious. However, if the mother becomes distressed, the infant will respond in kind. Outside of dealing with strangers, infants will also social reference a parent if they are given an unusual toy to play with. If the parent is pleased with the toy, the child will play with it longer than if the parent is displeased or disgusted.

**12.1.2.2. Play and affiliation.** Children are also motivated to engage in play. Up to about 1.5 years of age, children play alone called **solitary play**. Between 1 ½ and 2 years of age, children play side-by-side, doing the same thing or similar things, but not interacting with each other. This is called **parallel play**. **Associative play** occurs next and is when two or more children interact with one another by sharing or borrowing toys or materials. They do not do the same thing though. Around 3 years of age, children engage in **cooperative play** which includes games that involve group imagination such as “playing house.” Finally, **onlooker play** is an important way for children to participate in games or activities they are not already engaged in. They simply wait for the right moment to jump in and then do so. Though play develops across time, or becomes more complex, solitary play and onlooker play do remain options children reserve for themselves. Sometimes we just want to play a game by ourselves and not have a friend split the screen with us, as in the case of video games and if they are on the couch next to you.

**12.1.2.3. Attachment and affiliation, to people and God.** **Attachment** is an emotional bond established between two individuals and involving one's sense of security. Our attachments during infancy have repercussions on how we relate to others the rest of our lives. Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three attachment styles an infant possesses. The first is a *secure attachment* and results in the use of a mother as a home base to explore the world. The child will occasionally return to her. She also becomes upset when she leaves and goes to the mother when she returns. Next is the *avoidantly attached* child who does not seek closeness with her and avoids the mother after she returns. Finally, is the *ambivalent attachment* in which the child displays a mixture of positive and negative emotions toward the mother. She remains relatively close to her which limits how much she explores the world. If the mother leaves, the child will seek closeness with the mother all the while kicking and hitting her.

A fourth style has been added due to recent research. This is the *disorganized-disoriented attachment style* which is characterized by inconsistent, often contradictory behaviors, confusion, and dazed behavior (Main & Solomon, 1990). An example might be the child approaching the mother when she returns, but not making eye contact with her.

The interplay of a caregiver's parenting style and the child's subsequent attachment to this parent has long been considered a factor on the psychological health of the person throughout life. For instance, father's psychological autonomy has been shown to lead to greater academic performance and fewer signs of depression in 4<sup>th</sup> graders (Mattanah, 2001). Attachment is also important when the child is leaving home for the first time to go to college. Mattanah, Hancock, and Brand (2004) showed in a sample of four hundred four students at a university in the Northeastern United States that separation individuation mediated the link between secure attachment and college adjustment. The nature of adult romantic relationships

has been associated with attachment style in infancy (Kirkpatrick, 1997). One final way this appears in adulthood is through a person's relationship with a god figure.

An extrapolation of attachment research is that we can perceive God's love for the individual in terms of a mother's love for her child, but this attachment is not always to God. For instance, Protestants, seeing God as distant, use Jesus to form an attachment relationship while Catholics utilize Mary as their ideal attachment figure. It could be that negative emotions and insecurity in relation to God do not always signify the lack of an attachment relationship, but maybe a different type of pattern or style (Kirkpatrick, 1995). Consider that an abused child still develops an attachment to an abusive mother or father. The same could occur with God and may well explain why images of vindictive and frightening gods have survived through human history.

One important thing to note is that in human relationships, the other person's actions can affect the relationship, for better or worse. Perceived relationships with God do not have this quality. As God cannot affect us, we cannot affect Him. This allows the person to invent or reinvent the relationship with God in secure terms without allowing counterproductive behaviors to retard progress. Hence, Kirkpatrick (1995) says people "with insecure attachment histories might be able to find in God...the kind of secure attachment relationship they never had in human interpersonal relationships (p. 62)." The best human attachment figures are ultimately fallible while God is not limited by this.

Pargament (1997) defined three styles of attachment to God. First is the 'secure' attachment in which God is viewed as warm, receptive, supportive, and protective, and the person is very satisfied with the relationship. Next is the 'avoidant attachment' in which God is seen as impersonal, distant, and disinterested, and the person characterizes the relationship as one

in which God does not care about him or her. Finally, is the ‘anxious/ambivalent’ attachment. Here, God seems to be inconsistent in His reaction to the person, sometimes warm and receptive and sometimes not. The person is not sure if God loves him or not. We might say that the God of the secure attachment is the authoritative parent, the God of the avoidant attachment is authoritarian, and the God of the anxious/ambivalent attachment is permissive.

Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) note that attachment and religion may be linked in important ways. They offer a “**compensation hypothesis**” which states that insecurely attached individuals are motivated to compensate for the absence of this secure relationship by believing in a loving God. Their study evaluated the self-reports of 213 respondents (180 females and 33 males) and found that the avoidant parent-child attachment relationship yielded greater levels of adult religiousness while those with secure attachment had lower scores. The avoidant respondents were also four times as likely to have experienced a sudden religious conversion.

They also remind the reader that the child uses the attachment figure as a haven and secure base, and go on to note that there is ample evidence to suggest the same function for God. Bereaved persons become more religious, soldiers pray in foxholes, and many who are in emotional distress turn to God. Further, Christianity has a plethora of references to God being by one’s side always and the person having a friend in Jesus.

Pargament (1997) expanded upon the compensation hypothesis and showed that the relationship between attachment history and religious beliefs is far from simple. He summarized four relationships between parental and religious attachments extrapolated from Kirkpatrick’s research. First, if a child had a secure attachment to the parent, he may develop a secure attachment to religion, called ‘*positive correspondence*.’ In this scenario, the result of a loving and trusting relationship with one’s parents is transferred to God as well. This is contrary to the

findings of Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) which said that securely attached individuals displayed lower levels of religiosity. More in line with their view is Pargament's second category, secure attachment to parents and insecure attachment to religion, called '*religious alienation*.' Here the person who had a secure attachment to parents may not feel the need to believe in God. He does not need to compensate for any deficiencies.

The third category is also in line with Kirkpatrick and Shaver's study. Modeled after their hypothesis, '*religious compensation*' results from an insecure attachment to parents and a secure attachment to religion. Finally, an insecure attachment to parents may yield an insecure attachment to religion called '*negative correspondence*' (see Table 12.1). These insecure parental ties have left the person unequipped to build neither strong adult attachments nor a secure spiritual relationship. The person may cling to "false gods" like drug and alcohol addiction, food addiction, religious dogmatism, a religious cult, or a codependent relationship.

Table 12.1

## Four Attachment Models for Parent and Religious Attachment

Religion	Parent	
	Secure Attachment	Insecure Attachment
Secure Attachment	Positive Correspondence	Religious Compensation
Insecure Attachment	Religious Alienation	Negative Correspondence



### 12.1.3. Health Factors

“Loneliness kills.” These were the opening words of a March 18, 2015 Time article describing alarming research which shows that loneliness increases the risk of death. How so? According to the meta-analysis of 70 studies published from 1980 to 2014, social isolation increases mortality by 29%, loneliness does so by 26%, and living alone by 32%; but being socially connected leads to higher survival rates (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). The authors note, as did Tiwari (2013) earlier, that social isolation and loneliness should be listed as a public health concern as it can lead to poorer health and decreased longevity, as well as CVD (coronary vascular disease; Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2016). Other ill effects of loneliness include greater stimulated cytokine production due to stress which in turn causes inflammation (Jaremka et al., 2013); greater occurrence of suicidal behavior (Stickley & Koyanagi, 2016); pain, depression, and fatigue (Jarema et al., 2014); and psychotic disorders such as delusional disorders, depressive psychosis, and subjective thought disorder (Badcock et al., 2015).

On a positive note, Stanley, Conwell, Bowen, and Van Orden (2013) found that for older adults who report feeling lonely, owning a pet is one way to feel socially connected. In their study, pet owners were found to be 36% less likely than non-pet owners to report feeling lonely. Those who lived alone and did not own a pet had the greatest odds of reporting loneliness. But the authors offer an admonition – owning a pet, if not managed properly, could actually be deleterious to health. They write, “For example, an older adult may place the well-being of their pet over the safety and health of themselves; they may pay for meals and veterinary services for their pet at the expense of their own meals or healthcare.” Bereavement concerns were also raised, though they say that with careful planning, any negative consequences of owning a pet can be mitigated.

To read the Time article, please visit: <http://time.com/3747784/loneliness-mortality/>

#### 12.1.4. Social Rejection

Being rejected or ignored by others, called **ostracism**, hurts. No literally. It hurts. Research by Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, and Wager (2011) has shown that when rejected, brain areas such as the secondary somatosensory cortex and dorsal posterior insula which are implicated in the experience of physical pain, become active. So not only are the experiences of physical pain and social rejection distressing, the authors say that they share a common somatosensory representation too.

So, what do you do if you have experienced social rejection? A 2012 article by the American Psychological Association says to seek inclusion elsewhere. Those who have been excluded tend to become more sensitive to opportunities to connect and adjust their behavior as such. They may act more likable, show greater conformity, and comply with the requests of others. Of course, some respond with anger and aggression instead. The article says, “If someone’s primary concern is to reassert a sense of control, he or she may become aggressive as a way to force others to pay attention. Sadly, that can create a downward spiral. When people act aggressively, they’re even less likely to gain social acceptance.” The effects of long-term ostracism can be devastating but non-chronic rejection can be easier to alleviate. Seek out healthy positive connections with both friends and family as a way to combat rejection.

For more on the APA article, see <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/04/rejection>.

## 12.2. Factors on Attraction

### Section Learning Objectives

- Clarify how proximity affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how familiarity affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how beauty affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how similarity affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how reciprocity affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how playing hard to get affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Clarify how intimacy affects interpersonal attractiveness.
- Describe mate selection strategies used by men and women.

On April 7, 2015, Psychology Today published an article entitled, *The Four Types of Attraction*. Referred to as an attraction pyramid, it places status and health at the bottom, emotional in the middle, and logic at the top of the pyramid. *Status* takes on two forms. Internal refers to confidence, your skills, and what you believe or your values. External refers to your job, visual markers, and what you own such as a nice car or house. The article states that confidence may be particularly important and overrides external status in the long run. *Health* can include the way you look, move, smell, and your intelligence. The middle level is *emotional* which includes what makes us unique, trust and comfort, our emotional intelligence, and how mysterious we appear to a potential suitor. And then at the top is *logic* which helps us to be sure this individual is aligned with us in terms of life goals such as having kids, getting married, where we will live, etc. The article says – “With greater alignment, there is greater attraction.” Since online romance is trending now, the pyramid flips and we focus on logic, then emotion,

and then status and health, but meeting in person is important and should be done as soon as possible. This way, we can be sure there is a physical attraction and can only be validated in person.

To read the article for yourself, visit: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/valley-girl-brain/201504/the-four-types-attraction>

So how accurate is the article? We will tackle several factors on attraction to include proximity, familiarity, physical attractiveness, similarity, reciprocity, the hard-to-get effect, and intimacy, and then close with a discussion of mate selection.

### **12.2.1. Proximity**

First, *proximity* states that the closer two people live to one another, the more likely they are to interact. The more frequent their interaction, the more likely they will like one another then. Is it possible that individuals living in a housing development would strike up friendships while doing chores? This is exactly what Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) found in an investigation of 260 married veterans living in a housing project at MIT. Proximity was the primary factor that led to the formation of friendships. For proximity to work, people must be able to engage in face-to-face communication, which is possible when they share a communication space and time (Monge & Kirste, 1980) and proximity is a determinant of interpersonal attraction for both sexes (Allgeier and Byrne, 1972). A more recent study of 40 couples from Punjab, Pakistan provides cross-cultural evidence of the importance of proximity as well. The authors write, “The results of qualitative analysis showed that friends who stated that they share the same room or same town were shown to have higher scores on interpersonal attraction than friends who lived in distant towns and cities” (pg. 145; Batool & Malik, 2010).

### 12.2.2. Mere Exposure – A Case for Familiarity?

In fact, the more we are exposed to novel stimuli, the greater our liking of them will be, called the **mere exposure effect**. Across two studies, Saegert, Swap, & Zajonc (1973) found that the more frequently we are exposed to a stimulus, even if it is negative, the greater our liking of it will be, and that this holds true for inanimate objects but also interpersonal attitudes. They conclude, "...the mere repeated exposure of people is a sufficient condition for enhancement of attraction, despite differences in favorability of context, and in the absence of any obvious rewards or punishments by these people" (pg. 241).

Peskin and Newell (2004) present an interesting study investigating how familiarity affects attraction. In their first experiment, participants rated the attractiveness, distinctiveness, and familiarity of 84 monochrome photographs of unfamiliar female faces obtained from US high school yearbooks. The ratings were made by three different groups – 31 participants for the attractiveness rating, 37 for the distinctiveness rating, and 30 for the familiarity rating – and no participant participated in more than one of the studies. In all three rating studies, a 7-point scale was used whereby 1 indicated that the face was not attractive, distinctive, or familiar and 7 indicated that it was very attractive, distinctive, or familiar. They found a significant negative correlation between attractiveness and distinctiveness and a significant positive correlation between attractiveness and familiarity scores, consistent with the literature.

In the second experiment, 32 participants were exposed to 16 of the 24 most typical and 16 of the 24 most distinctive faces from the experiment and the other 8 faces serving as controls. The controls were shown once during the judgment phase while the 16 typical and 16 distinctive faces were shown six times for a total of 192 trials. Ratings of attractiveness were given during the judgment phase. Results showed that repeated exposure increased attractiveness ratings

overall, and there was no difference between typical and distinctive faces. These results were found to be due to increased exposure and not judgment bias or experimental conditions since the attractiveness ratings of the 16 control faces were compared to the same faces from experiment 1 and no significant difference between the two groups was found.

Overall, Peskin and Newell (2004) state that their findings show that increasing the familiarity of faces by increasing exposure led to increased attractiveness ratings. They add, “We also demonstrated that typical faces were found to be more attractive than distinctive faces although both face types were subjected to similar increases in familiarity” (pg. 156).

### 12.2.3. Physical Attractiveness

Second, we choose who we spend time with based on how *attractive* they are. Attractive people are seen as more interesting, happier, smarter, sensitive, and moral and as such are liked more than less attractive people. This is partly due to the **halo effect** or when we hold a favorable attitude to traits that are unrelated. We see beauty as a valuable asset and one that can be exchanged for other things during our social interactions. Between personality, social skills, intelligence, and attractiveness, which characteristic do you think matters most in dating? In a field study randomly pairing subjects at a “Computer Dance” the largest determinant of how much a partner was liked, how much he wanted to date the partner again, and how frequently he asked the partner out, was simply the physical attractiveness of the partner (Walster et al., 1966).

In a more contemporary twist on dating and interpersonal attraction, Luo and Zhang (2009) looked at speed dating. Results showed that the biggest predictor of attraction for both males and females was the physical attractiveness of their partner (reciprocity showed some

influence though similarity produced no evidence – both will be discussed shortly so keep it in mind for now).

Is beauty linked to a name though? Garwood et al. (1980) asked 197 college students to choose a beauty queen from six photographs, all equivalent in terms of physical attractiveness. Half of the women in the photographs had a desirable first name while the other half did not. Results showed that girls with a desirable first name received 158 votes while those with an undesirable first name received just 39 votes.

So why beauty? Humans display what is called a **beauty bias**. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman- Johnson (1994) investigated the reaction of 277 male, middle-class, Caucasian college students to a vignette in which they were asked to imagine receiving an uninvited sexual advance from a casual female acquaintance. The vignette displayed different degrees of coercion such as low-touch, moderate-push, high-threat, and very high-weapon. The results showed that men had a more positive reaction to the sexual advance of a female acquaintance who was attractive and who used low or moderate levels of coercion than to an unattractive female.

What about attractiveness in the workplace? Hosoda, Stone-Romero, and Coats (2006) found considerable support for the notion that attractive individuals fare better in employment-related decisions (i.e., hiring and promotions) than unattractive individuals. Although there is a beauty bias, the authors found that its strength has weakened over the past few decades.

#### 12.2.4. Similarity

You have likely heard the expressions “Opposites attract” and “Birds of a feather flock together.” The former expression contradicts the latter, and so this leads us to wonder which is it? Research shows that we are most attracted to people who are like us in terms of our religious and political beliefs, values, appearance, educational background, age, and other demographic variables (Warren, 1966). Thus, we tend to choose people who are *similar* to us in attitudes and interests as this leads to a more positive evaluation of them. Their agreement with our choices and beliefs helps to reduce any uncertainty we face regarding social situations and improves our understanding of the situation. You might say their similarity also validates our own values, beliefs, and attitudes as they have arrived at the same conclusions that we have. This occurs with identification with sports teams. Our perceived similarity with the group leads to group-derived self-definition more so than the attractiveness of the group such that, “... a team that is "crude, rude, and unattractive" may be appealing to fans who have the same qualities, but repulsive to fans who are more "civilized".” The authors suggest that sports marketers could emphasize the similarities between fans and their teams (Fisher, 1998). Another form of similarity is in terms of physical attractiveness. According to the **matching hypothesis**, we date others who are similar to us in terms of how attractive they are (Feingold, 1988; Huston, 1973; Bersheid et al., 1971; Walster, 1970).

#### 12.2.5. Reciprocity

Fourth, we choose people who are likely to engage in a mutual *exchange* with us. We prefer people who make us feel rewarded and appreciated and in the spirit of reciprocation, we need to give something back to them. This exchange continues so long as both parties regard



their interactions to be mutually beneficial or the benefits of the exchange outweigh the costs (Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If you were told that a stranger you interacted with liked you, research shows that you would express a greater liking for that person as well (Aronson & Worchel, 1966) and the same goes for reciprocal desire (Greitmeyer, 2010).

#### **12.2.6. Playing Hard to Get**

Does playing hard to get make a woman (or man) more desirable than the one who seems eager for an alliance? Results of five experiments said that it does not though a sixth experiment suggests that if the woman is easy for a particular man to get but hard for all other men to get, she would be preferred over a woman who is uniformly hard or easy to get, or is a woman for which the man has no information about. Men gave these selective women all of the assets (i.e. selective, popular, friendly, warm, and easy going) but none of the liabilities (i.e. problems expected in dating) of the uniformly hard to get and easy to get women. The authors state, “It appears that a woman can intensify her desirability if she acquires a reputation for being hard-to-get and then, by her behavior, makes it clear to a selected romantic partner that she is attracted to him” (pg. 120; Walster et al., 1973). Dai, Dong, and Jia (2014) predicted and found that when person B plays hard to get with person A, this will increase A’s wanting of B but simultaneously decrease A’s liking of B, only if A is psychologically committed to pursuing further relations with B. Otherwise, the hard to get strategy will result in decreased wanting and liking.

#### **12.2.7. Intimacy**

Finally, *intimacy* occurs when we feel close to and trust in another person. This factor is based on the idea of **self-disclosure** or telling another person about our deepest held secrets,

experiences, and beliefs that we do not usually share with others. But this revealing of information comes with the expectation of a mutual self-disclosure from our friend or significant other. We might think that self-disclosure is difficult online but a study of 243 Facebook users shows that we tell our personal secrets on Facebook to those we like and that we feel we can disclose such personal details to people with whom we talk often and come to trust (Sheldon, 2009).

This said, there is a possibility we can overshare, called *overdisclosure*, which may lead to a reduction in our attractiveness. What if you showed up for class a few minutes early and sat next to one of your classmates who proceeded to give you every detail of their weekend of illicit drug use and sexual activity? This would likely make you feel uncomfortable and seek to move to another seat.

#### **12.2.8. Mate Selection**

As you will see in a bit, men and women have vastly different strategies when it comes to selecting a mate. This leads us to ask why, and the answer is rooted in evolutionary psychology. Mate selection occurs universally in all human cultures. In a trend seen around the world, Buss (2004) said that since men can father a nearly unlimited number of children, they favor signs of fertility in women to include being young, attractive, and healthy. Since they also want to know that the child is their own, they favor women who will be sexually faithful to them.

In contrast, women favor a more selective strategy given the incredible time investment having a child involves and the fact that she can only have a limited number of children during her life. She looks for a man who is financially stable and can provide for her children, typically being an older man. In support of the difference in age of a sexual partner pursued by men and

women, Buss (1989) found that men wanted to marry women 2.7 years younger while women preferred men 3.4 years older. Also, this finding emerged cross-culturally.

### 12.3. Types of Relationships

#### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe how the social exchange theory explains relationships.
- Describe how the equity theory explains relationships.
- List and describe types of relationships.
- Define love and describe its three components according to Sternberg.
- Define jealousy.

#### 12.3.1. Social Exchange Theory

Recall from Section 11.2.9 that *social exchange theory* is the idea that we utilize a minimax strategy whereby we seek to maximize our rewards all while minimizing our costs. In terms of relationships, those that have less costs and more rewards will be favored, last longer, and be more fulfilling. Rewards include having someone to console us during difficult times, companionship, the experience of love, and having a committed sexual partner for romantic relationships. Costs include the experience of conflict, having to compromise, and needing to sacrifice for another.

#### 12.3.2. Equity Theory

**Equity theory** (Walster et al., 1978) consists of four propositions. First, it states that individuals will try to maximize outcomes such that rewards win out over punishments. Second,

groups will evolve systems for equitably apportioning rewards and punishments among members and members will be expected to adhere to these systems. Those who are equitable to others will be rewarded while those who are not will be punished. Third, individuals in inequitable relationships will experience distress proportional to the inequity. Fourth, those in inequitable relationships will seek to eliminate their distress by restoring equity and will work harder to achieve this the greater the distress they experience. The goal is for all participants to feel they are receiving equal relative gains from the relationship.

According to Hatfield and Traupmann (1981) if an individual feels that the ratio between benefits and costs are disproportionately in favor of the other partner, he or she may feel ripped off or underbenefited, and experience distress. So, what can be done about this? The authors state, “There are only two ways that people can set things right: they can re-establish *actual* equity or *psychological* equity. In the first case they can inaugurate real changes in their relationships, e.g. the underbenefited may well ask for more out of their relationships, or their overbenefited partners may offer to try to give more. In the latter case couples may find it harder to change their behavior than to change their minds and so prefer to close their eyes and to reassure themselves that “really, everything is in perfect order”” (pg.168).

### 12.3.3. Types of Relationships

Relationships can take on a few different forms. In what are called **communal relationships**, there is an expectation of mutual responsiveness from each member as it relates to tending to member’s needs while **exchange relationships** involve the expectation of reciprocity in a form of tit-for-tat strategy. This leads to what are called **intimate or romantic relationships**

in which you feel a very strong sense of attraction to another person in terms of their personality and physical features. Love is often a central feature of intimate relationships.

#### 12.3.4. Love

One outcome of this attraction to others, or the need to affiliate/belong is love. What is love? According to a 2011 article in Psychology Today entitled ‘*What is Love, and What Isn’t It?*’ love is a force of nature, is bigger than we are, inherently free, cannot be turned on as a reward or off as a punishment, cannot be bought, cannot be sold, and cares what becomes of us). Adrian Catron writes in an article entitled, “What is Love? A Philosophy of Life” that “the word love is used as an expression of affection towards someone else....and expresses a human virtue that is based on compassion, affection and kindness.” He goes on to say that love is a practice and you can practice it for the rest of your life. ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-love-a-philosophy\\_b\\_5697322](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-love-a-philosophy_b_5697322)). And finally, the Merriam Webster dictionary online defines love as “strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties” and “attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness felt by lovers.” (Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>).

Robert Sternberg (1986) said love is composed of three main parts (called the **triangular theory of love**): intimacy, commitment, and passion. First, **intimacy** is the emotional component and involves how much we like, feel close to, and are connected to another person. It grows steadily at first, slows down, and then levels off. Features include holding the person in high regard, sharing personal affect with them, and giving them emotional support in times of need. Second, **commitment** is the cognitive component and occurs when you decide you truly love the person. You decide to make a long-term commitment to them and as you might expect, is almost non-existent when a relationship begins and is the last to develop usually. If a relationship fails,

commitment would show a pattern of declining over time and eventually returns to zero. Third, **passion** represents the motivational component of love and is the first of the three to develop. It involves attraction, romance, and sex and if a relationship ends, passion can fall to negative levels as the person copes with the loss.

This results in eight subtypes of love which explains differences in the types of love we express. For instance, the love we feel for our significant other will be different than the love we feel for a neighbor or coworker, and reflect different aspects of the components of intimacy, commitment, and passion as follows:

*Table 12.2. Types of Love (According to Sternberg)*

Type of Love	Intimacy	Commitment	Passion	Example
Nonlove	No	No	No	
Liking	Yes	No	No	Friendships
Infatuation	No	No	Yes	Experiencing love at first sight or being obsessed with a person
Empty	No	Yes	No	Stagnant relationships
Fatuous	No	Yes	Yes	Relationships motivated by passion
Companionate	Yes	Yes	No	Relationships lacking passion such as those between family members or close friends
Romantic	Yes	No	Yes	Being bonded emotionally and physically to another person
Consummate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete love

**12.3.4.1. Jealousy.** The dark side of love is what is called **jealousy**, or a negative emotional state arising due to a perceived threat to one's relationship. Take note of the word perceived here. The threat does not have to be real for jealousy to rear its ugly head and what causes men and women to feel jealous varies. For women, a man's emotional infidelity leads her to fear him leaving and withdrawing his financial support for her offspring, while sexual

infidelity is of greater concern to men as he may worry that the children he is supporting are not his own. Jealousy can also arise among siblings who are competing for their parent's attention, among competitive coworkers especially if a highly desired position is needing to be filled, and among friends. From an evolutionary perspective, jealousy is essential as it helps to preserve social bonds and motivates action to keep important relationships stable and safe. But it can also lead to aggression (Dittman, 2005) and mental health issues.

## 12.4. Predicting the End of a Relationship

### Section Learning Objectives

- Describe Gottman's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.
- Propose antidotes to the horsemen.
- Clarify the importance of forgiveness in relationships.

### 12.4.1. Communication, Conflict, and Successful Resolution

John Gottman used the metaphor of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from the New Testament to describe communication styles that can predict the end of a relationship. Though not conquest, war, hunger, and death, Gottman instead used the terms criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Each will be discussed below, as described on Gottman's website: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-four-horsemen-recognizing-criticism-contempt-defensiveness-and-stonewalling/>

First, *criticism* occurs when a person attacks their partner at their core character "or dismantling their whole being" when criticized. An example might be calling them selfish and

saying they never think of you. It differs from a complaint which typically involves a specific issue. For instance, one night in March 2019 my wife was stuck at work until after 8pm. I was upset as she did not call to let me know what was going on and we have an agreement to inform one another about changing work schedules. Criticism can become pervasive and when it does, it leads to the other, far deadlier horsemen. “It makes the victim feel assaulted, rejected, and hurt, and often causes the perpetrator and victim to fall into an escalating pattern where the first horseman reappears with greater and greater frequency and intensity, which eventually leads to contempt.”

The second horseman is *contempt* which involves treating others with disrespect, mocking them, ridiculing, being sarcastic, calling names, or mimicking them. The point is to make the target feel despised and worthless. “Most importantly, *contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce*. It must be eliminated.”

*Defensiveness* is the third horseman and is a response to criticism. When we feel unjustly accused, we have a tendency to make excuses and play the innocent victim to get our partner to back off. Does it work though? “Although it is perfectly understandable to defend yourself if you’re stressed out and feeling attacked, this approach will not have the desired effect. Defensiveness will only escalate the conflict if the critical spouse does not back down or apologize. This is because defensiveness is really a way of blaming your partner, and it won’t allow for healthy conflict management.”

*Stonewalling* is the fourth horseman and occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, or stops responding to their partner. They may tune out, act busy, engage in distracting behavior, or turn away and stonewalling is a response to contempt. “It is a result of



feeling physiologically flooded, and when we stonewall, we may not even be in a physiological state where we can discuss things rationally.”

Conflict is an unavoidable reality of relationships. The good news is that each horseman has an antidote to stop it. How so?

- To combat criticism, engage in *gentle start up*. Talk about your feelings using “I” statements and not “you” and express what you need to in a positive way. As the website demonstrates, instead of saying “You always talk about yourself. Why are you always so selfish?” say, “I’m feeling left out of our talk tonight and I need to vent. Can we please talk about my day?”
- To combat contempt, *build a culture of appreciation and respect*. Regularly express appreciation, gratitude, affection, and respect for your partner. The more positive you are, the less likely that contempt will be expressed. Instead of saying, “You forgot to load the dishwasher again? Ugh. You are so incredibly lazy.” (Rolls eyes.) say, “I understand that you’ve been busy lately, but could you please remember to load the dishwasher when I work late? I’d appreciate it.”
- To combat defensiveness, *take responsibility*. You can do this for just part of the conflict. A defensive comment might be, “It’s not my fault that we’re going to be late. It’s your fault since you always get dressed at the last second.” Instead, say, “I don’t like being late, but you’re right. We don’t always have to leave so early. I can be a little more flexible.”
- To combat stonewalling, engage in *physiological self-soothing*. Arguing increases one’s heart rate, releases stress hormones, and activates our flight-fight response. By taking a short break, we can calm down and “return to the discussion in a respectful

and rational way.” Failing to take a break could lead to stonewalling and bottling up emotions, or exploding like a volcano at your partner, or both. “So, when you take a break, it should last at least twenty minutes because it will take that long before your body physiologically calms down. It’s crucial that during this time you avoid thoughts of righteous indignation (“I don’t have to take this anymore”) and innocent victimhood (“Why is he always picking on me?”). Spend your time doing something soothing and distracting, like listening to music, reading, or exercising. It doesn’t really matter what you do, as long as it helps you to calm down.”

#### **12.4.2. Forgiveness**

According to the Mayo Clinic, **forgiveness** involves letting go of resentment and any thought we might have about getting revenge on someone for past wrongdoing. So what are the benefits of forgiving others? Our mental health will be better, we will experience less anxiety and stress, we may experience fewer symptoms of depression, our heart will be healthier, we will feel less hostility, and our relationships overall will be healthier.

It’s easy to hold a grudge. Let’s face it, whatever the cause, it likely left us feeling angry, confused, and sad. We may even be bitter not only to the person who slighted us but extend this to others who had nothing to do with the situation. We might have trouble focusing on the present as we dwell on the past and feel like life lacks meaning and purpose.

But even if we are the type of person who holds grudges, we can learn to forgive. The Mayo Clinic offers some useful steps to help us get there. First, we should recognize the value of forgiveness. Next, we should determine what needs healing and who we should forgive and for what. Then we should consider joining a support group or talk with a counselor. Fourth, we need

to acknowledge our emotions, the harm they do to us, and how they affect our behavior. We then attempt to release them. Fifth, choose to forgive the person who offended us leading to the final step of moving away from seeing ourselves as the victim and “release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life.”

At times, we still cannot forgive the person. They recommend practicing empathy so that we can see the situation from their perspective, praying, reflecting on instances of when you offended another person and they forgave you, and be aware that forgiveness does not happen all at once but is a process.

Read the article by visiting: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

### **Module Recap**

That’s it. With the close of this module, we also finish the book. We hope you enjoyed learning about attraction and the various factors on it, types of relationships, and complications we might endure. As we learned, conflict is inevitable in any type of relationship, but there is hope. Never give up or give in.

Module 12 is the last in Part IV: How We Relate to Others.

## Glossary



**Abstract** - A 150-250 word summary of a research article

**Acceptance** – When we think that the behavior we are being influenced to follow is the correct thing to do in the situation

**Actor-observer bias** - When the actor overestimates the influence of the situation on their own behavior while the observer overestimates the importance of the actor's personality traits on the actor's behavior

**Affective forecasting** – When emotions affect the decisions we make about our future

**Aggression** - Any behavior, whether physical or verbal, that is carried out with the intent to harm another person

**Aggression schemas** - Provide us information about when aggression may be appropriate and the form it should take

**Alternative activity** – A different task students must be offered in lieu of participating in a research study

**Altruistic behavior** - When we choose to help another person voluntarily and with no expectation of reward or acknowledgement

**Anchoring and adjustment heuristic** - Helps us answer questions about another person by starting with an initial value, oftentimes the self when asked to make a social judgment, and then adjust accordingly

**Applied science** - Desires to find solutions to real-world problems

**Archival research** - When the researcher analyzes data that has already been collected and for another purpose

**Attachment** - An emotional bond established between two individuals and involving one's sense of security

**Attitude** - Our assessment of ourselves, other people, ideas, and objects in our world

**Attribution theory** – The theory which explains how we decide why someone did what they did

**Attributional ambiguity** - Refers to the confusion a person may experience over whether or not they are being treated prejudicially

**Audience inhibition**- When we decide that helping is risky because we could look foolish in front of other witnesses

**Authoritarian personality** – A personality style in which a person displays an exaggerated submission to authority, is intolerant of weakness, endorses the use of punitive measures toward outgroup members or deviants, and conformity to ingroup leaders

**Automata** – Machines and mechanical contraptions created to imitate human movement and action

**Availability heuristic** - Our tendency to estimate how likely an event is to occur based on how easily we can produce instances of it in our mind

**Aversive racism** - When a person denies personal prejudice but has underlying unconscious negative feelings toward another racial group

## **B**

**Base-rate fallacy** – Our tendency to focus on distinctive features of a person and ignore or underuse information that describes most people

**Basic science** - Concerned with the acquisition of knowledge for the sake of the knowledge and nothing else

**“Bask in reflected glory” (BIRG)** - people have a tendency to publicly announce their associations with successful others

**Behavioral self-handicapping** - When we are uncertain about our abilities and anticipate a threat to our self-esteem, we prepare an excuse in advance

**Belief in a just world (BJW) hypothesis** - States that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people

**Belief perseverance** – When our belief persists in the face of contradictory information

**“Better than average” (BTA) effect** - People have a tendency to evaluate themselves much higher than they evaluate others

**Bystander effect** – States that the chances that we will aid someone needing help decreases as the number of bystanders increases

## **C**

**Category** – A group to which people are assigned to

**Central route to persuasion** – Also called systematic processing, occurs when we carefully consider the message content

**Cognitive dissonance** – When we will realize that some behaviors we are engaging in do not fit with one of our attitudes or we will have two attitudes that we realize seem to contradict each other, this results in an unpleasant feeling that we want to immediately get rid of or reduce

**Communal relationships** – When there is an expectation of mutual responsiveness from each member as it relates to tending to member’s needs

**Compliance** – When we publicly go along but privately, we disagree with or don't want to engage in the behavior we are going along with

**Confederate** – An individual who is part of a study without the participant knowing

**Confirmatory hypothesis testing** - Occurs when we select information from others that confirms an existing belief or schema

**Conformity** - The real or imagined pressure of others

**Confound** - When a factor other than the independent variable leads to changes in the dependent variable

**Conjunction error** - Occurs when a person assumes that events that appear to go together will occur together

**Consistency bias** - Our tendency to recall events in a way consistent with our beliefs and biases

**“Contact hypothesis”** - States that contact between groups can promote acceptance and tolerance but only when four conditions are met (See Section 9.3.2 for the conditions)

**Content validity** - To what degree a measure covers the construct of interest

**Control group** – The group in an experiment that does not receive the treatment or is not manipulated

**Convenience sample** – A sample that is readily available and easy to obtain

**Correlational Research** – A research method which examines the relationship between two variables or two groups of variables

**Correspondent inference theory** - Provides one way to determine if a person's behavior is due to dispositional or situational factors and involves examining the context in which the behavior occurs

**Counterfactual thinking** - “What might have been” situations we imagine

**Courtesy stigma** - When stigma affects people associated with the person with a mental disorder, physical disability, or who is overweight or obese

**Covariation theory** - Says that something can only be the cause of a behavior if it is present when the behavior occurs but absent when it does not occur and that we rely on three kinds of information about behavior: distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency

**Creative synthesis** – Proposed by John Stuart Mill, says that there is a combining of mental elements such that the product yields some distinct quality not present in the individual elements themselves

**Criterion validity** – When we expect a person's scores on one measure to be correlated with scores on another measure that we expect it to be related to

**Critical thinking** - Our ability to assess claims made by others and make objective judgments that are independent of emotion and anecdote and based on hard evidence

**Culture** - Includes all the beliefs, customs, institutions, experience, values, attitudes, art, religion, etc. of a group of people

**Culture of honor** – States that in some cultures, individuals are expected to safeguard their reputation, family, or property by answering threats, insults, and affronts with violence

**Cyberbullying** - Involves the use of technology such as social media, e-mail, chatrooms, texting, video games, Youtube, or photographs to humiliate, embarrass, intimidate, or even threaten someone to gain power and control over them

## **D**

**Dark Triad** – Personality traits including Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy that are thought to be responsible for aggression

**Debriefed** - When the true purpose of a study is revealed and participants are told where to go if they need assistance and how to reach the researcher if they have questions



**Deception** – When researchers intentionally withhold the true purpose of the study from participants

**Defensive pessimism** - Helps us manage our anxiety and pursue our goals by setting low expectations and mentally exploring possible outcomes of goal-relevant tasks

**Dehumanization** - When we view an individual as not having human qualities or being less human

**Deindividuation** - Explains the effect of losing your own personal identity in a crowd, which allows you to engage in behaviors you wouldn't normally do alone

**Dependent variable** – The variable in an experiment that is measured

**Descriptive statistics** – A type of statistic that provides a means of summarizing or describing data, and presenting the data in a usable form

**Desensitization** – Seeing frequent acts of violence can make a person numb to it, or less sensitive to the pain of other

**Determinism** - The idea that every act is determined or caused by past events and so it is possible to predict changes that will occur in the operation of the universe

**Diffusion of responsibility** - When others are around we feel less responsibility to help

**Discounting principle** - States that when more than one cause is possible for a person's behavior, we will be less likely to assign any cause

**Discrimination** - When a person *acts* in a way that is negative against a group of people

**Disinhibition** - Reduction of our control such that the part of the brain that under normal conditions inhibits aggressive tendencies is anesthetized by alcohol

**Displacement** - When we channel a feeling or thought to a substitute target because we cannot aggress against the primary target either due to social norms, laws, or it is not accessible to us

**Dispositional attribution** – Assigning an internal or personal cause to why someone did what they did

**Dispositional optimism** - A stable individual difference that reflects the general perception that future positive outcomes will be common and future negative outcomes will be rare

**Domains of the self** - The actual, ideal, and ought selves

**Door-in-the-face** – When something large is presented and the metaphorical door is slammed in your face because the request is too big. Then you knock and offer a smaller request, which is usually accepted

**Downward social comparison** - Instead of comparing our performance to others to see where we rate, we will look for someone we know performs worse than we do or is worse off than we are and make a comparison

**Dualism** - The idea that questions whether the mind and body are distinct from one another

**Duchenne smile** – A real smile

## **E**

**Egotistical behavior** - Behavior focused on the self

**Emotional intelligence** or **EI** - Our ability to manage the emotions of others as well as ourselves and includes skills such as empathy, emotional awareness, managing emotions, and self-control

**Empathy** - When we put ourselves in another person's shoes and vicariously experience their perspective

**Empathy-altruism hypothesis** - States that when we feel empathy for a person, we will help them for purely altruistic reasons with no concern about personal gain

**Empiricism** - The idea that all knowledge is derived from sensory experience

**Event schema (script)** - Type of schema which tells us what is to occur in certain situations

**Evolutionary psychology** – The idea that evolutionary processes have affected and shaped both body and brain and that they are adaptations to solve problems that contribute to the survival of the species

**Exchange relationships** – Those that involve the expectation of reciprocity in a form of tit-for-tat strategy.

**Excitation-transfer theory** - States that physiological arousal dissipates slowly such that we may still be slightly aroused as we move from an initial situation that caused an increase in arousal to subsequent situations

**Exemplars** - Perfect examples of a prototype

**Experimental group** – The group in an experiment that does receive the treatment or manipulation

**Experimental realism** - The degree to which the experimental procedures that are used feel real to the participant

**Experiments** – A controlled test of a hypothesis in which a researcher manipulates one variable and measures its effect on another variable

**Explicit attitudes** - Attitudes that are obvious and known or at the level of conscious awareness

**External validity** - If our results do generalize from the circumstances under which our study was conducted to similar situations

## **F**

**Face validity** - The extent to which a measurement method appears “on its face” to measure the construct of interest

**False consensus effect** – When we overestimate to what degree their opinion is shared by others

**False modesty** – When you perform well but downplay your performance instead of gloating and talk about the contributions of your fellow teammates instead

**False uniqueness effect** – When we underestimate to what degree others share our abilities and skills

**Figure-ground** - Indicates that figure stands out against ground in our perceptual field

**Foot-in-the-door phenomenon** – When a person makes a small request first; Once you agree to the small request the communicator will ask for something larger

**Forgiveness** - Involves letting go of resentment and any thought we might have about getting revenge on someone for past wrongdoing

**Framing** - The way in which choices are presented to us

**Free riding** – When a group member can decrease their effort and still benefit from the efforts of others group members

**Frustration** - When a person is prevented from reaching a goal because something or someone stands in the way

**Frustration-aggression hypothesis** - The idea that the occurrence of frustration always leads to aggression and this aggression is caused by our being frustrated

**Fundamental attribution error** - An error in assigning a cause to another's behavior in which we automatically assume a dispositional reason for his or her actions and ignore situational factors

## **G**

**Gaps** - Holes in the literature; or topics needing additional research

**Generalizability** – In research, when we can make statements about the population from our sample

**Group** – When two or more people are interdependent, interact and influence one another

**Groupthink** - When group members suppress dissent toward a poor decision because of a set of antecedent conditions

**Group polarization** - When others sharing the same perspective are put into a group and left to discuss, they will move to a more extreme opinion from their initial opinion

**Group-serving bias** – When we ignore an outgroup member's positive behavior and assign dispositional attributions to their negative behavior while attributing negative behavior to situational factors and positive behavior to dispositional ones for ingroup members

**Group stereotype** - Includes our beliefs about what are the typical traits or characteristics of members of a specific group

## **H**

**Halo effect** – When positive information about a person leads us to assume other positive qualities

**Heuristics** – Mental shortcuts

**Hostile or physical aggression** - Occurs when a person intends to harm another person by hitting, shooting, kicking, punching, or stabbing them, or by simply threatening such action

**Hostile attribution bias** - Leads people to project blame onto others and is an extra-punitive mentality

**Hypothesis** - A specific, testable prediction

# I

**Implicit attitudes** - Attitudes that we might not even be aware we hold

**Independent variable** – The variable in an experiment that is manipulated

**Independent or individualistic self** – States that individuals reject conformity, focus on individual traits and goals, and seek personal achievement

**Inferential statistics** – A type of statistics that allows for the analysis of two or more sets of numerical data

**Informed consent** - When the person agrees to participate because they are told what will happen to them

**Ingratiation** - Complimenting, flattering, or engaging in other acts that lead a person to do things for you or like you

**Ingroup favoritism** – When we favor ingroups to enhance our own self-esteem and produce a positive self-concept

**In-groups** - Groups we identify with

**Instinct theory of motivation** - States that all of our activities, thoughts, and desires are biologically determined or evolutionarily programmed through our genes and this serve as our source of motivation

**Instincts** – Inborn and inherited predispositions to act in predictable ways to certain stimuli

**Instrumental aggression** - Occurs when a person attempts to obtain something but does not intend to harm others

**Interdependent or collectivistic self** – States that people identify the self in a social context, believe in blending in, focus on group goals, promote solidarity, and are against egotism

**Internal consistency** - The consistency of people's responses across the items on multiple-item measures

**Internal validity** - When we can confidently say that the effect on the dependent variable was due solely to our manipulation or the independent variable

**Interpersonal attraction** - Showing a preference for another person

**Inter-rater reliability** - How consistent different observers are when making judgments

**Intimate or romantic relationships** – A relationship in which you feel a very strong sense of attraction to another person in terms of their personality and physical features

**Introduction** – The first section of a research article designed to provide a summary of the current literature as it relates to the topic

**Introspection** - Looking inward

## **J**

**Jealousy** - A negative emotional state arising due to a perceived threat to one's relationship

## **K**

**Kin selection** (also known as *inclusive fitness theory*) - States that any behavior aiding a genetic relative will be favored by natural selection

## **L**

**Laboratory observation** - Involves observing people or animals in a laboratory setting

**Literature review** - When we conduct a literature search through our university library or a search engine such as Google Scholar to see what questions have been investigated already and what answers have been found

**Locus of control** - Our sense of competence is affected by the degree to which we blame internal or external forces for our success and failures

**Loneliness** - Occurs when our interpersonal relationships are not fulfilling and can lead to psychological discomfort

**Looking-glass self** – The ideas that we base our sense of self on how we think others see us and this social interaction serves as a sort of mirror in which people use the judgments of others to measure their own worth, behavior, and values

**Lowballing** - The communicator will put forward an attractive offer, one that is hard to say no to. Once the offer is agreed to, you will come up with new reasons for why you are glad you made the commitment to this offer. The original offer is removed. The whole reason you went along with it was because of that desirable offer and now it is gone. We go along with it and are happy about it

## **M**

**Machiavellianism** - A trait reflecting a person's willingness to manipulate others

**Matching hypothesis** - We date others who are similar to us in terms of how attractive they are

**Mechanism** - The idea that the world is a great machine and all natural processes were thought to be mechanically determined and so could be explained by the laws of physics and chemistry

**Mere exposure effect** – States that the more we are exposed to novel stimuli, the greater our liking of them will be

**Meta-analysis** - A statistical procedure that allows a researcher to combine data from more than one study

**Method** – The section of a research article in which participants, materials or apparatus, and procedure are described in detail; it is like a cookbook

**Microexpressions** - Facial expressions that are made briefly, involuntarily, and last on the face for no more than 500 milliseconds

**Misinformation effect** - Occurs when we receive misleading information about a recently witnessed event and then incorporate this inaccurate information into our memory of the event

**Modern racism** – Racism that only appears when it is safe and socially acceptable to do so

**Multi-cultural research** - An area of cross-cultural psychology which focuses on racial and ethnic diversity within cultures

**Multi-method research** – When several approaches or research designs are used to provide the clearest picture of what is affecting behavior or mental processes

**Mundane realism** - Occurs when the research setting closely resembles the real world setting



## **N**

**Narcissism** - Involves our tendency to seek admiration and special treatment

**Naturalistic observation** – When a scientist studies human or animal behavior in its natural environment

**Need for cognition** - Enjoyment from engaging in effortful cognitive activity

**Need for uniqueness** – The need to feel different from others or from the anonymous majority

**Need to affiliate/belong** - Our motive to establish, maintain, or restore social relationships with others, whether individually or through groups

**Negative reciprocity beliefs** - An individual's proclivity to reciprocate negative treatment for negative treatment or to take an eye for an eye

**Negative-state relief model** - A person might to alleviate their own bad mood and feel better by engaging in helping behavior

**Negativity effect** - Negative aspects of a person's behavior or personality stand out more and are attended to more, even when equally extreme positive information is present

**Non-Duchenne smile** – A fake smile

**Nonverbal leakage** - Refers to the fact that when we are interacting with another person, we have a tendency to focus more on what we are saying and less on what we are doing

**Norm of social responsibility** - States that we should help another person without any concern about future exchange

**Norms** - Rules for how a culture's members should behave

## **O**

**Obedience** – When we comply with a direct order from a perceived authority

**Observational learning** - Learning by simply watching others

**Old-fashioned racism** - The belief that whites are superior to all other racial groups and lead to segregation

**Operant conditioning** - A type of associative learning which focuses on consequences that follow a response or behavior that we make (anything we do, say, or think/feel) and whether it makes a behavior more or less likely to occur

**Outgroup homogeneity effect** – When we tend to see members of the outgroup as similar to one another while our ingroup is seen as varied

**Out-groups** - Groups that are not our own

**Overconfidence phenomenon** – When it comes to the accuracy of our judgments, we have a tendency to overestimate just how good we are called

## **P**

**Psychopathy** - Refers to a person's tendency to be callous and insensitive, impulsive, and to exert poor self-control

**Perceived expertise** - Defined as someone we perceive to be both knowledgeable on a topic and has the ability to share accurate information with us

**Perceived self-interest** – When we help with an expectation of a specific form of repayment

**Perception** – Add meaning to the raw sensory data collected through sensation

**Perceptual contrast** – When there is a change in perception related to how things are presented

**Perceptual set** - Indicates the influence of our beliefs, attitudes, biases, stereotypes, and mood, on how we perceive and respond to events in our world

**Peripheral route** – Also called heuristic processing occurs when we cannot commit the time to adequately assess a decision; uses situational cues

**Person schema** – A schema which relates to certain types of people

**Personality psychology** - The scientific study of individual differences in people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and how these come together as a whole

**Persuasion** – Trying to convince another person of an attitude they should adopt, a behavior they should make, or an emotion they should feel

**Philosophy** - The love and pursuit of knowledge

**Positive illusions** – When people hold opinions of themselves that are exaggerated or falsely positive regarding abilities and skills

**Positivity bias** – Our tendency to evaluate people positively

**Possible selves** – The person we might become

**Prejudice** - When someone holds a negative *feeling* about a group of people, representing the affective component

**Primacy effect** – When our initial interaction with a stranger sticks with us

**Priming** - When a word or idea used in the present affects the evaluation of new information in the future

**Private self-consciousness** - Refers to an individual who focuses on the internal self, is introspective, and attends to one's thoughts, feelings, and motives

**Prosocial behavior** - Any act we willingly take that is meant to help others, whether the 'others' are a group of people or just one person

**Prototypes** - Schemas used for special types of people or situations

**Public self-consciousness** - Refers to an individual who focuses on themselves as a social object and is concerned by how they appear to others

**Psychology** - The scientific study of behavior and mental processes

## Q

## R

**Random assignment** – When participants have an equal chance of being placed in the control or experimental group

**Random sampling** - When everyone in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample

**Reactance** – When our freedoms are threatened or eliminated resulting in an unpleasant feeling that motivates us to restore our threatened freedom

**Realistic group conflict theory** - Competition that occurs between groups due to real imbalances of power and resources

**Reciprocal altruism** - An organism acts in a way that benefits others at expense to itself. It does so because it expects that in the future, the recipient of the altruistic act, who does not have to be related to the altruist, will reciprocate assistance

**Reciprocity**- When someone does something for us we feel indebted to them and want to immediately return to equity in our relationship

**Reciprocity norm** - States that we are more likely to survive if we enter into an understanding with our neighbor to help in times of need

**Reductionism** - Breaking things down to their basic components

**Reflected appraisal** – When we come to see ourselves as those important to us see us

**Relational aggression** - Occurs when efforts are made to damage another person's relationships and could include spreading rumors, name calling, ignoring a person, or social exclusion

**Relative deprivation** - Simply believing that your situation is improving but slower than other groups, can lead to instances of intergroup conflict

**Reliability** - Describes how consistent a measure is

**Reluctant altruism** – When we feel pressured by peers to engage in altruistic behavior

**Replication** - Repeating the study to confirm its results

**Research design** – Our plan of action of how we will go about testing the hypothesis

**Respondent conditioning** - When we link a previously neutral stimulus (NS) with a stimulus that is unlearned or inborn, called an unconditioned stimulus (US)

**Results** – In this section of a research article the researcher states the outcome of the experiment and whether it was statistically significant or not

**Role schemas** – Schemas which relate to how people carrying out certain roles or jobs are to act

**Rumination** - When we constantly think about something.

## **S**

**Schema** – Information obtained, stored, and retrieved about some aspect of our world

**Scientific method** - A systematic method for gathering knowledge about the world around us

**Self-awareness** – When we turn our attention inward

**Self-concept** - The way we see ourselves

**Self-disclosure** - Telling another person about our deepest held secrets, experiences, and beliefs that we do not usually share with others

**Self-discrepancy theory** - Helps us to understand discrepancies between our view of our self and who we would ideally like to be or believe other people think we should be

**Self-distancing** - When our egocentric experience of a stimulus is reduced

**Self-efficacy** - Our sense of competence and feeling like we can deal with life's problems

**Self-enhancement** - A fundamental component of human nature and involves our tendency to see ourselves in a positive light

**Self-esteem** - How we see ourselves, including both positive and negative evaluative components

**Self-fulfilling prophecies** - When predictions are made about us or by us that eventually come true since we engage in behavior that confirms these expectations

**Self-monitoring** - Observing our own behavior so that we can make adjustments to produce the impression we desire in others and to meet the demands of the situation

**Self-perception theory** – When we look to our actions to determine what it is we are feeling

**Self-presentation** - Any strategies we use to make ourselves appear in a more positive light to others

**Self-promotion** - Engaging in behaviors or saying positive things about oneself

**Self-reference effect** – The ability to more efficiently process, and recall more accurately, information about ourselves

**Self-regulation** - Controlling and directing our thoughts, feelings, and actions so that we can achieve a societal or personal goal

**Self-schema** – Schemas we have about ourselves

**Self-serving bias** - Our tendency to see ourselves in a favorable light

**Self-verification** – When we want to confirm our existing self-concept but from the eyes of others

**Sensation** - The detection of physical energy emitted or reflected by physical objects

**Situational attribution** – Assigning an environmental cause to why someone did what they did

**Social cognition** - The study of the process of collecting and assessing information about others so that we can draw inferences and form impressions about them

**Social comparison theory** – When we compare ourselves to someone else to get a sense of our abilities and skills

**Social desirability** - When a participant answers questions on a survey dishonestly so that he/she is seen in a more favorable light

**Social dominance orientation (SDO)** – Someone who views their ingroup as dominant and superior to outgroups and seeks to enforce the hierarchy as it exists now

**Social exchange theory** – States that we utilize a minimax strategy whereby we seek to maximize our rewards all while minimizing our cost

**Social facilitation theory** - When we experience arousal from the presence of others, we should expect to see improved performance on easy or dominant tasks (these are things we do often) and we should expect to see decreased performance on difficult or non-dominant tasks (these are things we have never done or don't do often)

**Social identity theory** - Asserts that people have a proclivity to categorize their social world into meaningfully simplistic representations of groups of people

**Social loafing** - When we are working together toward a common goal, the presence of others will have demotivating effects on us

**Social neuroscience** - How the brain affects our social behavior and is affected by it

**Social norms** - Unwritten rules that guide our behavior

**Social perception** – The process by which we go about learning about people

**Social proof** — Our heuristic that if others are doing it, it must be correct

**Social psychology** - The scientific study of behavior and mental processes as they relate to how people interact with, or relate to, others

**Sociology** - The study of society or groups, both large and small

**Standpoints on the self** - Whose perspective on the self is involved

**Statistical significance** - An indication of how confident we are that our results are due to our manipulation or design and not chance

**Stereotype threat** - The social-psychological predicament that arises from widely-known negative stereotypes about one's group

**Stigma** - When negative stereotyping, labeling, rejection, devaluation, and/or loss of status occur due to membership in a particular social group

**Surveys** – A questionnaire consisting of at least one scale with some number of questions which assess a psychological construct of interest

**Symbolic racism** - When negative views of another racial group are coupled with values such as individualism

**Sympathy** - When we feel compassion, pity, or sorry for another due to the hardships they have experienced

**System justification theory** - Proposes that people are motivated to varying degrees, to defend, bolster, and justify existing social, political, and economic arrangements, also known as the status quo, to maintain their advantaged position

## **T**

**Teacher expectancy effect** or **Pygmalion effect** – When teachers hold certain beliefs and expectations about the personality and behavior of poor and exceptional students and this in turn affects their performance

**Terror Management Theory** – The idea that posits that worldviews serve as a buffer against the anxiety we experience from knowing we will die someday

**Test-retest reliability** - How reliable a measure is across time

**Theory** – The systematic explanation of a phenomenon

**Theory of planned behavior** - A model that would allow us, through someone's evaluation of behavior (attitudes) and thoughts on whether other important people would do the behavior (subjective norms), to predict their intention to do behavior and then that intention would predict whether they actually end up making the behavior

**Theory of reasoned action** – Building on the theory of planned behavior, it added perceived behavioral control



**Tolerance** – Respecting, accepting, and appreciating the views and lifestyles of others

**Transduction** - Converting physical energy into electrochemical codes

**Two-factor theory of emotion** - States that how we perceive our own emotions depends on two factors: 1) how much physiological arousal we experience such as rapid breathing, sweating, and/or a pounding heart, and 2) the cognitive interpretation or label we apply such as angry, scared, or happy

## **U**

**Unconscious motivation** – When we are motivated by forces outside conscious awareness

**Unrealistic optimism** - A tendency people have to think they are invulnerable and that others will be the victims of misfortune but not themselves

**Upward social comparison** - When we compare our traits and abilities against someone who is more skilled than we are which can lead us to engage in motivated behavior to improve, but it could also leave us feeling incompetent, shameful, or jealous

**Urban overload hypothesis** - Says that high levels of urban stimulation can overload people and produce negative effects on their perception of the city and other residents such that they tune them out

## **V**

**Valid** – When a questionnaire’s scores represent the variable it is said to measure

**Vicarious reactance** – When our freedoms do not actually have to be personally threatened or eliminated; simply hearing or observing someone else’s freedoms being threatened or eliminated can elicit reactance

**Victim-blaming** - When shift focus from the perpetrator and taint the target of violence

## **W**

**“What is beautiful-is-good” heuristic** — This mental shortcut results in us automatically connecting a person’s attractiveness with the qualities of being good, kind, smart, etc.

**Wishful seeing** – The tendency to see what one wants to see

## **X**

## **Y**

## **Z**

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