Chapter 11: Social Psychology

Social Psychology

The branch of psychology that investigates how your thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by the presence of other people and by the social and physical environment

Social Cognition

How we form impressions of other people, how we interpret the meaning of other people's behavior, and how our behavior is affected by our attitudes.

- Person perception
- Social categorization
- Implicit personality theory
- Attribution
- Attitudes
- Stereotypes

Person Perception

- The mental processes we use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics of other people.
- An active, interactive, and subjective process that always occurs in some *interpersonal context.*
- Your reactions are determined by your perceptions of others.
- Your goals determine the amount and kind of information you collect.
- You evaluate people partly in terms of how you expect them to behave (social norms).
- Your self-perception influences how you perceive others.

Social Categorization

The mental process of classifying people into groups on the basis of common characteristics

Explicit and Implicit Cognition

•Explicit Cognition: The deliberate, conscious mental processes involved in perceptions, judgments, decisions, and reasoning

•Implicit Cognition: the mental processes associated with automatic, nonconscious social evaluations

Implicit Personality Theory

•One's previous social and cultural experiences influence the cognitive *schemas,* or mental frameworks, you hold about the traits and behaviors associated with different "types" of people.

•When you perceive someone to be a particular "type," you assume that the person will display those traits and behaviors.

Physical Attractiveness

•Implicit cultural message is "beautiful is good"

•Attractive people are perceived as more intelligent, happier, and better adjusted.

•Really no difference between attractive and less attractive people on these characteristics.

•Attractive people are more likely to attribute other people's approval of their accomplishments to looks rather than to effort or talent.

Physical Attractiveness

- Brain reward areas have been shown to be responsive to facial attractiveness.
- Of particular note is an area called the *orbital frontal cortex*, which is a region of the frontal cortex located just above the orbits (or sockets) of your eyes.
- Another region is the *amygdala*.
- Both the orbital frontal cortex and the amygdala are selectively responsive to the reward value of attractive faces.
- Facial beauty evokes a widely distributed neural network involving perceptual, decision-making, and reward circuits.
- The social advantages associated with facial attractiveness are reinforced by reward processing in the brain.

Attribution

- Process of inferring the causes of people's behavior, including one's own
- The explanation given for a particular behavior

Attribution Bias

- Fundamental attribution error
- Actor-observer discrepancy
- Blaming the victim (just-world hypothesis)
- Self-serving bias
- Self-effacing bias

Table 11.1

Common Attributional Biases and Explanatory Patterns

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

Using Attitudes as Ways to "Justify" Injustice

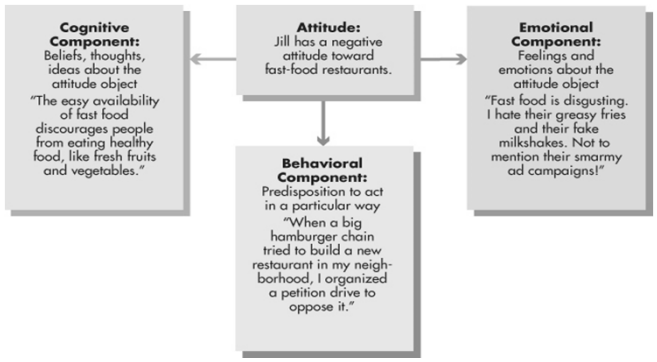
- Just-world bias
  - a tendency to believe that life is fair; for example, it seems horrible to think that you can be a good person and bad things could happen to you anyway
- Just-world bias leads to "blaming the victim"
  - we explain others' misfortunes as being their fault, as in: She deserved to be raped. What was she doing in that neighborhood anyway?

Attitudes

What is an attitude?

- Predisposition to evaluate some people, groups, or issues in a particular way
- Can be negative or positive
- Has three components
  - Cognitive—thoughts about given topic or situation
  - Affective—feelings or emotions about topic
  - Behavioral—your actions regarding the topic or situation

The Components of Attitudes



Cognitive Dissonance

- Unpleasant state of psychological tension or arousal that occurs when two thoughts or perceptions are inconsistent
- When attitudes and behaviors are in conflict:
  - it is uncomfortable for us
  - we seek ways to decrease the discomfort caused by the inconsistency

Dissonance-Reducing Mechanisms

- Avoiding dissonant information
  - we attend to information in support of our existing views, rather than information that doesn't support them
- Firming up an attitude to be consistent with an action
  - once we've made a choice to do something, lingering doubts about our actions would cause dissonance, so we are motivated to set them aside

Prejudice

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

Stereotypes

What is a stereotype?

- A cluster of characteristics associated with all members of a specific group of people
- a belief held by members of one group about members of another group

Social Categories

- In-group—the social group to which we belong
  - In-group bias—tendency to make favorable attributions to members of our in-group
  - Ethnocentrism is one type of in-group bias
- Out-group—the social group to which you do not belong
  - Out-group homogeneity effect—tendency to see members of the out-group as more similar to one another

Stereotypes

• One's tendency to stereotype social groups seems to be a natural cognitive process

•Stereotypes simplify social information so that we can sort out, process, and remember information about other people more easily

•However, relying on stereotypes can cause problems

•Attributing a stereotypic cause for an outcome or event can blind us to the true causes of events

Social Identity and Cooperation

Social identity theory

- states that when you're assigned to a group, you automatically think of that group as an in-group for you
- Sheriff's Robbers Cave study
  - 11- to 12-year-old boys at camp
  - boys were divided into 2 groups and kept separate from one another
  - each group took on characteristics of distinct social group, with leaders, rules, norms of behavior, and names

Robbers Cave (Sheriff)

Leaders proposed series of competitive interactions which led to three changes between groups and within groups

- within-group solidarity
- negative stereotyping of other group
- hostile between-group interactions

Robbers Cave

Overcoming the strong we/they effect

- establishment of superordinate goals
  - eg, breakdown in camp water supply
- overcoming intergroup strife
  - stereotypes are diluted when people share individuating information

The Jigsaw Classroom

•Aronson (1992) brought together students in small, ethnically diverse groups to work on a mutual project.

•Each student had a unique contribution to make toward the success of the group; interdependence and cooperation replaced competition

•Results: Children in the jigsaw classrooms had higher self-esteem and a greater liking for children in other ethnic groups than those in traditional classrooms

•Less negative stereotypes and prejudice and a reduction in intergroup hostility

Social Influence

How behavior is influenced by the social environment and the presence of other people

- Conformity
- Obedience
- Helping Behaviors

Conformity

•Adopting attitudes or behaviors of others because of pressure to do so; the pressure can be real or imagined

•Two general reasons for conformity

– Informational social influence — other people can provide useful and crucial information

– Normative social influence — desire to be accepted as part of a group leads to that group having an influence

Effects of Nonconformity

•If everyone agrees, you are less likely to disagree.

•BUT, if one person disagrees, even if they give the wrong answer, you are more likely to express your nonconforming view.

•Asch tested this hypothesis

– one confederate gave different answer from others

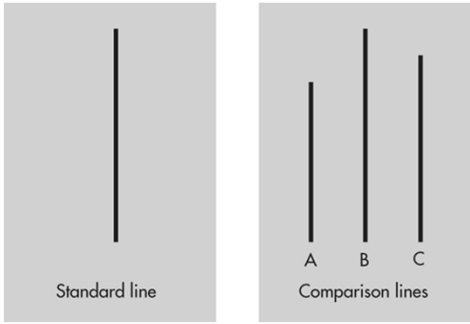
– conformity dropped significantly

Asch's Experiments on Conformity

Previous research had shown people will conform to others' judgments more often when the evidence is ambiguous.

Asch's Experiments on Conformity

- All but 1 in group was confederate
- Seating was rigged
- Asked to rate which line matched a "standard" line
- Confederates were instructed to pick the wrong line 12/18 times



Asch's Experiments on Conformity

Results

- Asch found that 75% participants conformed to at least one wrong choice.
- Subjects gave wrong the answer (conformed) on 37% of the critical trials.

Why did they conform to clearly wrong choices?

- informational influence?
- Subjects reported having doubted their own perceptual abilities, which led to their conformance – didn't report seeing the lines the way the confederates had

Obedience

Obedience

- compliance is due to perceived authority of requester
- request is perceived as an order

Milgram was interested in unquestioning obedience to orders.

Stanley Milgram's Studies

Basic study procedure

- teacher and learner (learner always confederate)
- watch learner being strapped into chair
- learner expresses concern over his "heart condition"

Stanley Milgram's Studies

- Teacher goes to another room with experimenter
- Shock generator panel – 15 to 450 volts, labeled "slight shock" to "XXX"
- Asked to give higher shocks for every mistake learner makes

Stanley Milgram's Studies

- Learner protests more and more as shock increases
- Experimenter continues to request obedience even if teacher balks

Table 11.3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Obedience

- How many people would go to the highest shock level?
- 65% of the subjects went to the end, even those who protested

Table 11.4

The Results of Milgram's Original Study

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

Explanations for Milgram's Results

Abnormal group of subjects?

- numerous replications with variety of groups shows no support

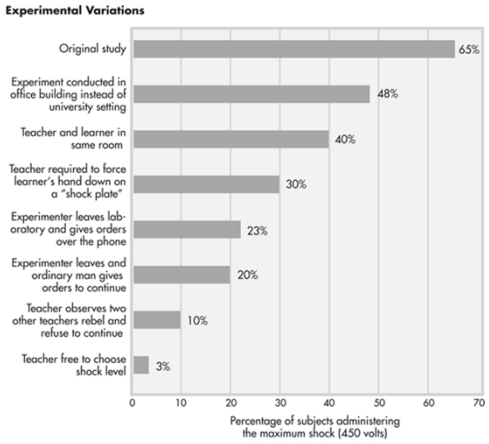
People in general are sadistic?

- videotapes of Milgram's subjects show extreme distress

Explanations for Milgram's Results

- Authority of Yale and value of science
- Experimenter self-assurance and acceptance of responsibility
- Proximity of learner and experimenter
- New situation and no model of how to behave

Follow-Up Studies to Milgram



Critiques of Milgram

•Although 84% later said they were glad to have participated and fewer than 2% said they were sorry, there are still ethical issues.

•Do these experiments really help us understand real-world atrocities (e.g. abuse at Abu Ghraib)?

Why Don't People Always Help Others in Need?

Diffusion of responsibility

- presence of others leads to decreased help response
- we all think someone else will help, so we don't have to help

Why Don't People Always Help Others in Need?

•Latané studies

- several scenarios designed to measure the help response
  - found that if you think you're the only one that can hear or help, you are more likely to do so
  - if there are others around, you will diffuse the responsibility to others

•Kitty Genovese incident

Increasing Bystander Help

•"Feel good, do good" effect

•Feeling guilty

•Seeing others who are willing to help

•Perceiving the other person as deserving help

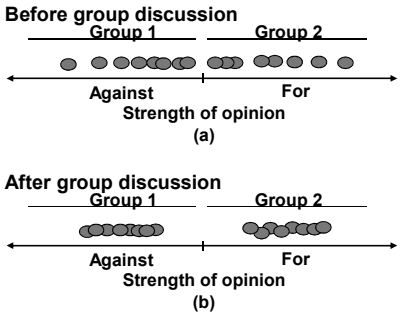
•Knowing how to help

•A personal relationship

Social Pressure in Group Decisions

Group polarization
- majority position stronger after a group discussion in which a minority is arguing against the majority point of view

Why does this occur?
- informational and normative influences



Sales Techniques and Cognitive Dissonance

Foot-in-the-door technique
- ask for something small at first, then hit customer with larger request later
- small request has paved the way to compliance with the larger request
- cognitive dissonance results if person has already granted a request for one thing, then refuses to give the larger item

The Reciprocity Norm and Compliance

We feel obliged to return favors, even those we did not want in the first place.
- opposite of foot-in-the-door
- salesperson gives something to customer with the idea that they will feel compelled to give something back (buying the product)
- even if person did not wish for favor in the first place

Defense Against Persuasion Techniques

•Sleep on it — don't act on something right away

•Play devil's advocate — think of all the reasons you shouldn't buy the product or comply with the request

•Pay attention to your gut feelings — if you feel pressured, you probably are