These materials were designed by me years ago as part of a correspondence course. Since you don’t have a textbook to refer to in this class, I thought some of this might be helpful as you review for the test. At times it refers to “chapters” or “assignments”—ignore these terms as they refer to the document’s original use. There is also less information on some of the new topics I’ve added to this course—this does NOT mean that these are less important! You should study everything from the Powerpoints and lectures, readings, assignments (e.g., information on the IAT), and videos in class. The test will be 50 multiple choice questions.

**Topic 1**

Before beginning our discussion of social psychology, try this quiz to see what you already know.

**Social Psychology Pretest**

Please answer the following true/false questions about social behavior. Circle "T" if you believe an item is true and "F" if you believe the item is false. (Don’t worry--this test is not being graded.)

T F 1. Most of us have quite accurate insight into the factors that influence our moods.

T F 2. Memory is like a storage chest in the brain, into which we deposit material and from

 which we can withdraw it later if needed. Occasionally, something gets lost from the

 "chest" and then we say we have forgotten.

T F 3. Most people rate themselves as worse-than-average when rating themselves on socially

 desirable characteristics.T F 4. People's behavior is best predicted in terms of their personalities or inner dispositions.T F 5. To alter the way people act, one needs first to change their hearts and minds.

T F 6. People who are made self-conscious by looking into a mirror act more in line with

 their attitudes.T F 7. The greater the reward promised for an activity, the more one will enjoy the activity.

T F 8. Depressed persons tend to be unrealistic in their perceptions of themselves.

T F 9. In overall vocabulary, happiness, and intelligence, males and females are not

 noticeably different.T F 10. In countries everywhere, girls spend more time helping with housework and child

 care, while boys spend more time in unsupervised play.T F 11. Most people would disobey an authority who orders them to hurt a stranger.T F 12. Persuaders will always be more effective if they acknowledge opposing arguments.

T F 13. In a formal debate, it is always to your advantage to be the last speaker.

T F 14. People pull harder in a tug-of-war when part of a team than when pulling by

 themselves.

T F 15. The greater the cohesiveness or "we feeling" in a group, the more likely the group

 will make a good decision.T F 16. When white and black students are shown faces of a few white and black individuals

 and then asked to pick these individuals out of a photographic lineup, both white and

 black students more accurately recognize the white faces than the black.T F 17. To be mentally healthy, people need an opportunity to act out, and thus to vent, their

 aggression.T F 18. The more often we see something-- even if we don't like it at first-- the more we grow

 to like it.T F 19. As suggested by the dumb-blonde idea, physically attractive men and women tend to

 be looked on by others as colder, dumber, and less moral than the plainer people.T F 20. Opposites attract.

T F 21. When we feel guilty, we are more likely to help those around us.

T F 22. If you want to buy a new car at the best price, it is best to adopt a tough bargaining

 stance by opening with a very low offer rather than with a sincere, "good faith" offer.

To how many items did you answer “true”? Actually, though most people feel that at least some of these items are true, research shows each of them to in fact be false. How many questions did you get correct on the quiz? One of the problems that people have when learning about social psychology is that findings often seem to be “just common sense”. As this quiz illustrates however, sometimes we think we know more about human behavior than we actually do. Because we’re all interested in social behavior and experience it every day, we have our own theories about why people do the things they do. Some of your theories are probably correct, whereas others may not be as correct. During this course you will learn what research says about human behavior. Many of the topics from the quiz will later be discussed in class.

The syllabus defines social psychology as “the scientific study of the way in which people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the real, imagined, or implied presence of others”. The first component of the definition, *scientific study* describes the methods used in social psychology. Social psychology is a science; it uses the scientific method to study human behavior. That means that we form hypotheses and use objective means to try to test them. This is different from nonscientific thought such as folk wisdom (common sense) or philosophy.

You may believe that “opposites attract”. You’ve heard others talk about the concept for years, and you can probably think of an example of a friend or acquaintance who seems attracted to his or her opposite. You’ve also probably heard that “birds of a feather flock together” and can think of examples of couples who seem very similar to each other. When you really think about it though, can both of these statements be equally true? They are each saying opposite things. One of the problems with folk wisdom is that it can often explain results (such as who marries who in this example) however they may turn out. Social psychologists study many of the same topics as folk wisdom, but use scientific methods to try to discover the true answer (as you’ll discover in Assignment 10, the research overwhelming suggests that we prefer others who are similar to us over those who are different). You’ll learn more about the specific techniques social psychologists use to test their hypotheses in the second topic.

The next component of the definition of social psychology is “people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors”. Though a few early social psychologists studied social interactions in animals (and even plants!), social psychology is today primarily a study of human behavior. The vast majority of the studies you will read about in this course were done using human participants. This component of the definition also suggests how broad social psychology is. We study thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In this course you’ll learn something about each of these areas.

The final component of the definition talks about the influence of the “real, imagined, or implied presence of others”. Social psychology isn’t just about how you are affected by actual other people, but also how you are affected by others within your own mind. Other people don’t have to be physically present to affect how you react. You may react in a certain way because of what you think people will think (even if it’s not in fact how they would actually respond).

Social psychology is a relatively new science, though it has its roots in antiquity. The ancient Greek philosophers wrote about people’s motives and why they behave as they do, though they did not use the scientific method to study these topics. It wasn’t until the late 19th century that German researchers began to use the scientific method to study psychological topics such as sensation and memory.

A few years later, the first social psychology study was conducted. Triplett was interested in bicycle racing and noticed that the racers did better if they were competing against actual others vs. racing against the clock. He designed a study in 1898 to see if people’s performance is affected by the presence of others. He asked children to spool fishing wire onto a line, sometimes with other children present, and sometimes when alone. He found that the children wound the wire more quickly when other children were present. Group performance was one of the first topics in which social psychologists became interested. You’ll learn about the more recent research related to Triplett’s study in Assignment 9.

The first social psychology textbooks were published in 1908. Early work emphasized the experimental method over the correlational method, studies of conformity and group influence, and research on emotion. Social psychology continued to grow as a discipline throughout the 20th century, despite the strong influence of behaviorism in most areas of psychology. It really expanded with World War II, which brought European psychologists to America and began social psychologists’ interest in practical applications. Researchers studied troops and the public to determine their attitudes (and how to change them). The use of persuasion and propaganda was important to the war effort, and social psychologists contributed to specific applications such as how to convince soldiers to brush their teeth when out in the field and those on the homefront to eat foods that were plenty and cut back on those that were scarce.

Through the 1950’s and 60’s both basic (research for the sake of knowledge) and applied social psychology grew and flourished, and by the 1970’s we had a set of reliable and interpretable findings. The cognitive revolution in the 1970’s also expanded the subject matter of social psychology, putting more emphasis on how people think about themselves and their social world, as opposed to earlier studies which had focused primarily on behavior.

Two major trends in contemporary social psychology include an increased emphasis on cognitive (thought) influences on behavior and an increase in practical applications of social psychology. All the areas you will read about are still being researched, however, with our knowledge being constantly refined and expanded.

This class session gives you a good introduction to the broad areas of study in social psychology and how this science differs from other related scientific and nonscientific areas of study.

Objectives

1. Define social psychology and identify topics social psychologists study.

2. Differentiate social psychology from folk wisdom. Explain why social psychology is more likely to be accurate.

3. Compare and contrast social psychology with personality psychology and sociology.

4. Describe the fundamental attribution error and the power of the situation in determining people’s behavior.

5. Be able to provide examples of studies in which the power of the situation had positive (e.g., beach helping) vs. negative (e.g., prison study) effects.

6. Provide some reasons why people may act in ways that they wouldn’t otherwise.

7. Be able to distinguish between personal and situational reasons for behaving in a certain way.

8. Define some of the major approaches in social psychology.

### Topic 2

This is a very important topic, both for this class and for your life. That may sound like a strong statement, but it is important to understand research methods even if you never do any research yourself. Every day we are exposed to the results of social research studies—on television, in the newspapers, and in magazines. We need to understand the methods these studies use in order to interpret their findings. If we blindly treat each study with equal attention, we might avoid olive oil one day (as a study cites that it leads to some disease or other) and slather everything with olive oil the next (as another study comes out touting the health benefits of olive oil)! Understanding the methods and pitfalls of research make us better consumers of research information.

This topic may be more or less difficult to you depending on whether you’ve had a class in social research methods before. If you have, many of the topics will be a review. If you haven’t, you may have to pay more attention to learn all the concepts. Many new terms are introduced in the chapter, but grouping them into areas may make them easier to remember.

There are three main research methods in social psychology—observation, survey, and experiment. Observational research is just what it sounds like—we observe behavior to learn about social phenomena. You do a sort of observational research when you watch people in the mall and make conclusions about their dress, actions, or partners. The difference between this informal observation and what a social psychologist does is again the scientific method. Social psychologists who do observational research determine the criteria they will observe before they begin the study to make their findings more objective. In the mall example, you might tend to notice that young women are dressing more masculinely these days. But how do you know that the two very noticeable young women with green hair who walked by caught your attention and caused you to ignore the 15 more femininely (and conventionally) dressed young women? Even if you kept track of how many women were dressed masculinely vs. femininely, you’d have to be sure to define exactly what you meant by “masculine” and “feminine” beforehand and make sure that your coding didn’t change during the study. You’d also want to be sure that your findings weren’t affected by a particular event occurring at the mall that day (such as a punk concert or a Future Homemakers of America rally) or the particular mall, town, or state in which you were observing. These last issues are issues of external validity—how much can you say that your findings would hold for other people, places, times, and situations. All of these are issues that the observational researcher must address.

The second method often used by social psychologists is the survey or correlational method. In this type of study, people are asked questions about their attitudes, personality, or behavior. This may occur during an interview on the telephone or in person, but most often occurs in written questionnaires. You’ve probably participated in survey studies—whether at your university or through a mail questionnaire your car salesman or stereo company sent to you. The Neilson television ratings and the U. S. census are well-known surveys. While surveys have some advantages over observational research such as being able to study things that aren’t easily observable (such as attitudes, personality, or sexual behavior), they have their own list of disadvantages as well. Survey methodologists must be careful about how their questions are worded, what order they are presented in, and how the interviewer responds, as these may affect information received. They also have to worry about sampling. This relates to the problem of external validity discussed above. How do you know that the people answering your questionnaire are good representatives of the group of people to whom you want to generalize your results?

In a survey or observational study, we can find that two things are related to each other. For example, we may find in a survey that years of education is related to liberal attitudes about politics, such that those who have more education tend to be more liberal (this doesn’t mean that everyone who is very educated is liberal or that all uneducated people are conservative, it just relates what happens on average). We cannot determine from this survey that education causes people to be more liberal, however. It is just as likely that liberal people choose to go into fields that require more education, such as college professor, or that some other factor, such as parental attitudes causes people to both be more liberal and to go to school for many years. With correlational or survey research we can never know which of the three ways causality goes—whether A causes B, B causes A, or some other variable causes both A and B.

Another example of how correlation doesn’t necessarily indicate causation is represented by a finding I read in the newspaper a few years ago. It reported that the larger a woman’s feet, the less trouble she has in childbirth. Does this finding mean that large feet cause less trouble in childbirth (maybe some sort of gravitational pull is emitted from feet that cause the baby to come barreling toward them)? Probably not. Do difficult childbirths lead women’s feet to get smaller (maybe all the strain causes the feet to shrink)? I doubt it. Most likely there is a third variable that explains this relationship—such as that women with large feet also tend to have large hips, which do facilitate childbirth. Another finding I read more recently and that may or may not be more immediately relevant to you is that the more education a person has, the less often that person reports having sex. Can you think of other variables that might account for this relationship?

Only with experiments, the third method, can we understand causality. This is because in an experiment, the researcher controls the situation so that the only thing different between two or more groups is the variable the researcher is interested in—the independent variable. If there is a difference between or among the groups, the researcher knows that the difference must have been caused by the independent variable, as everything else is the same. There must be random assignment to conditions for a study to be an experiment. People must be randomly assigned to each experimental group. This ensures that any differences between the groups at the end of the study are not due to differences between them at the beginning of the study.

There must also be a controlled situation, with at least one independent variable (the variable the experimenter is controlling) and at least one dependent variable (the variable the experimenter measures). For example, assume a researcher is interested in how music affects learning in elementary school children. She might randomly assign children to one of three groups—those who listen to classical music during their lessons, those who listen to jazz, and those who do not listen to any music at all. Type of music is the independent variable because that what is different among the groups, and there are three levels of the independent variable—classical, jazz, and none. The group with no music is the control group, the comparison group that is not receiving any treatment. After a week, the researcher may give all the students a test to see how much they’ve learned. This would be the dependent variable. Of course, there are many other aspects of the study that the experimenter would need to worry about, including issues of internal and external validity. Internal validity deals with other possible causes for the effects found in the study. If the children in the music study were learning different class subjects, we could not be sure whether the effects were due to the music or to the subjects learned. A well-controlled experiment will reduce problems of internal validity.

Try another example. In a study, female students either read an anti-sunbathing message that focuses on medical reasons for avoiding the sun, an anti-sunbathing message that focuses on physical appearance reasons for avoiding the sun, or a message about an unrelated topic. Half of the time this message is presented by a female experimenter, and the other half of the time by a male experimenter. After reading the message, students rate their likelihood of sunbathing in the next week.

What is the independent variable(s)?

How many levels does it have?

Is there a control group?

What is the dependent variable?

The answers are given at the bottom of this section.

In reality, many studies are not strictly observation, survey, or experiments, but may have some elements of each. In one study I recently did with two students at UNI, we randomly assigned people to conditions of writing about either a recent positive, negative, or neutral event they had had with a romantic partner (thus making it an experiment). But then we had our participants answer several questions about the relationship (making it like a survey). In another study, we randomly assigned people to different seating configurations and then observed whether or not they helped a fallen experimenter, thus combining elements of experimentation with those of observation. These studies would be classified as experiments because they feature random assignment to conditions and will allow us to talk about what caused people to act or respond as they did, but we borrowed from the other methods as well.

In other cases, people may try to get around some of the disadvantages of each method by doing different studies using the different methods but getting at the same topic. For example, one researcher interested in how layoffs affect people’s motivation to work studied both the survey responses of people in a company who had been laid off and the reaction of students in a laboratory experiment who were “laid off” during the study. One of Bibb Latané (pronounced LAT-in-a) and John Darley’s experiments on helping behavior is will be described later in the class. Participants in their study believed that a fellow participant was suffering from an epileptic seizure. Latané and Darley were interested in how the social situation would affect their helping of this person—would people be less likely to help if they believed other people were present (and not reacting) than if they believed they were the only ones hearing the seizure? This line of research, which we will discuss in more detail later, showed the counterintuitive finding that, if you are in need of assistance, you might actually stand more chance of getting help if you were lying in a sparsely populated area than if you were outside of Grand Central Station! Their conclusions are not just based on this one study, however. They created many helping situations (electrocuted experimenters, fallen experimenters, bleeding people in subway cars, people needing money for a telephone call, etc.) to increase the generalizability of their findings. They also combined laboratory experiments (high in internal validity but low in external validity) with field studies (such as the subway study; high in external validity but low in internal validity).

This topic also discusses the ethical dilemmas social psychologists must face in their research and what our guidelines suggest that we must do to ensure the welfare of our participants. Social psychology is a particularly interesting area of psychology in which to discuss ethical dilemmas. Because we are interested in human social behavior, the questions we want to ask may sometimes require that our participants do not know the whole story about what we are studying. Knowing what we were interested in might change their behavior. The Milgram obedience study and the Zimbardo prison experiment are often discussed as ethical dilemmas. It is unlikely that these studies could be conducted under today’s tighter ethical guidelines.

The topics in this chapter will come around in every other topic in this class, as you read about observation, survey, and experimental studies done by researchers in each of the areas. Try to keep in mind the advantages and disadvantages of the methods when you read the research reports and notice what they did to try to increase the validity of their studies.

**Answers to independent/dependent variable example.** There were actually two independent variables. The first was type of message, with three levels—medical focus, appearance focus, or the control group with no information. The second and more difficult independent variable was gender of the experimenter. Remember that some people had a male one and others a female one. The dependent variable was the ratings of likelihood of sunbathing in the next week.

Learning objectives

1. Know what criteria a testable hypothesis must have. Tell from where hypotheses can come. Be able to identify good hypotheses and operational definitions.

2. Identify the three main research methods used in social psychology. Determine which method should be used in different circumstances. Describe the advantages and limitations of each approach.

3. Identify the different types of observation.

4. Explain the difference between positive and negative correlations. Discuss what a correlation means (that it doesn’t necessarily indicate causation).

5. Discuss what defines an experiment. Distinguish between the independent and dependent variables and identify them in a study.

6. Distinguish between internal and external validity and be able to tell when a study is high in one vs. the other.

7. Explain why random assignment to conditions is important.

8. Distinguish between basic and applied research.

9. Distinguish between field and lab research.

10. Outline the ethical concepts of social psychology.

### Topic 3

In this chapter, we begin to get into more of the content of social psychology. We begin by studying what we know about how people think about themselves and others. This area of social psychology, called social cognition, is one of the most recently growing areas in the discipline. It draws from cognitive psychology. If you’ve taken a course in cognitive psychology, you may recognize some of the concepts here, such as the schema.

Schemas are a central concept in social cognition. A schema is a thought structure, something within your head, that represents your general knowledge about a concept. You have some self-schemas, ideas about what you personally are like. For example, you may think of yourself as being a very friendly person; you may have a schema for yourself as friendly. You can also have person schemas or schemas about what certain kinds of people are like. Your schema of a professor may include information such as “intelligent”, “old”, “powerful”, and “interesting” (these are schema elements generated by students in one of my classes). You can also have role schemas, or ideas about appropriate behaviors for people in certain roles. You may have a schema of mothers as nurturing or doctors as wearing stethoscopes and asking you to disrobe. Finally, there are event schemas. These schemas represent our knowledge about what happens during an event, such as a football game or a restaurant visit. Assume you hear that Joe went to a restaurant and looked over the menu to decide what he wanted. Then later, after Joe paid the waiter, he left. Even though I haven’t explicitly given you the information that Joe received his meal and ate it, you probably assumed that information, based on your schema of what happens in a restaurant.

Schemas help us to organize the world. If we had to actively think about what was going to happen next at the restaurant or how a person was going to act when they met us, we wouldn’t have much ability to process other information. Schemas make our lives easier by affecting what we notice, what we think about, and what we remember. Unfortunately, they also sometimes cause us to make incorrect conclusions.

Schemas affect how we take in information. We may forget information that isn’t consistent with our schemas. Say you have a schema of bartenders as being outgoing, somewhat wild individuals. After meeting your friend’s new boyfriend, whom you know is a bartender, you may forget that he was wearing glasses and quoted Shakespeare, but remember his tattoo and stories of partying. They also influence our memory for old information. If you think of accountants as being very serious individuals, you may, when thinking about your friend the accountant, tend to remember only the times he was serious, and not the time he told so many jokes you thought you were going to laugh to death.

Schemas also affect our inferences for missing information. If we know that someone is a Greenpeace activist, has long hair, and wears Birkenstocks, we might assume that he is a Democrat. Even though he never told us that he was, our memories will fill in that missing information, and we may truly believe that he has told us. This part of schemas is especially relevant to issues of eyewitness testimony. People aren’t as good at recognizing and remembering information as we think we are. Sometimes, schemas may fill in missing information. If you believe that criminals usually have brown eyes and wear black clothing and are over six feet tall, your schema may fill in some of this information for you, so that as a robbery witness, you believe you saw a 6’1” brown-eyed man wearing a black leather jacket even when you didn’t. If you are interested in the applications of schemas to eyewitness testimony and how eyewitness testimony can be made more accurate (it is much less accurate than the average person believes), you may want to read Module 2 in the text on social psychology and the law for more information.

Schemas may seem much like stereotypes, and they are similar in many ways. One difference between schemas and stereotypes is that stereotypes apply only to groups of people, whereas we may hold schemas of our own characteristics, events, and objects as well. A second difference is that schemas are a very individual concept. You may have a schema for a professor that is very different from mine. We may be able to find other people who do not have a schema for professor at all. But stereotypes are usually considered shared representations. Though we may have different thoughts about what the elderly are like, the two of us could probably agree on some elements of the elderly stereotype. We’ll talk more about stereotypes in the next class.

Aside from affecting our own thoughts and behaviors, our schemas can also affect how other people think through self-fulfilling prophesies. If I believe that my new roommate is rude and stuck up, I may treat her according to those expectations. Because I am treating her rudely, she will probably act rude in return, thus confirming my suspicion that she was rude in the first place. Our expectancies about people can actually affect their behavior. In one study (Snyder, Tanke, & Bersheid, 1977), males were given a picture of either a very attractive female or a not-so-attractive female. They were then asked to talk to this person on the telephone. In actuality, however, the women they were talking to were not the women they had pictures of. Nonetheless, the males that talked to an “attractive” female rated their telephone partner in more positive terms (nice, friendly, etc.) than did males who thought they were talking to an unattractive woman. But even more interestingly, when other raters later listened only to the female portions of the telephone conversations, they rated the women who the men thought were attractive as being friendlier and nicer than the women who were believed to be unattractive. In actuality, there was no difference in attractiveness between the two groups of women, but the men’s beliefs had shaped the women’s behavior, causing them to act in the way the men expected.

Another well-known and important application of self-fulfilling prophesy is the classroom study discussed in the book. Just as our beliefs about others affect the way they act toward us, the expectations that teachers have for their students can affect the students’ academic achievement. If you expect a child to fail, he often will. But you can counteract these self-fulfilling prophesies by treating everyone in positive ways. If you are a teacher, encourage and believe in all the children in your classroom. It’s like your mother may have told you—act nice to people and they’ll be nice to you in return.

We also discussed several examples of automatic thinking, involving the effects of smells, warmth, weight, death, and money.

One type of controlled thinking we discussed was counterfactual thinking. This says that the easier it is to mentally “undo” something, the stronger our emotional reaction will be. For example, you’re likely to be more upset if you miss a plane by 2 minutes than if you missed it by an hour. If you only missed it by 2 minutes, you can easily think of all the things you could have done differently—eaten breakfast more quickly, ran that last red light, parked in the first space you saw—that would have led to a different outcome. One recent application of this is in athletic competition. The third place winner in the Olympics is generally much happier than the second place winner. The second place winner is thinking about how if she had done something differently, she could have been first, while the third place winner is comparing to all those others who didn’t place at all.

After reading about all the errors we make in information processing, you may start to believe that humans aren’t very good at processing information. In fact, however, we generally do a pretty good job of figuring things out about our social world. Though heuristics and schemas sometimes lead to faulty thinking, they also save us time and are sometimes right. The last sections of the chapter discuss when we do automatic versus controlled processing and how to make people better thinkers.

This topic also deals with how we think about the social world, but it goes into the specifics of social perception—how we form impressions of and make inferences about other people. The first section of the chapter discusses nonverbal communication. We make inferences about other people based not only on what they say, but on how they say it—their facial expressions, hand movements, and body gestures. Six emotions—anger, happiness, surprise, fear, disgust, and sadness—seem to be recognizable across cultures, suggesting that at least some of our facial expressions may have evolutionary roots. Other emotions such as contempt, pride, and embarrassment, may also be seen across cultures.

Other nonverbal behavior is defined by our culture. Display rules are culturally determined rules about the types of nonverbal behavior that are appropriate to display. If you traveled to Spain, you would probably notice that looking strangers you pass in the street directly in the eye is not an appropriate behavior, though it is an almost expected behavior in many parts of the United States. Emblems are other nonverbal behaviors that differ across cultures. These are gestures that have well-understood definitions within a culture, such as the peace sign, okay sign, or upraised middle finger in this country. In certain parts of Latin America, our okay sign (thumb and forefinger forming a circle) is a negative gesture. A friend of mine from Latin America was excited to find a Mickey Mouse shirt with the okay symbol when he visited the United States. He thought a shirt showing Mickey in essence “flipping people off” was very amusing!

Attribution theory describes how we explain the causes of our own and others’ behavior. This theory deals with how we decide whether an action was due to personal factors or to situational factors. Fritz Heider, the father of attribution theory, called attributions of personal causes “internal attributions” and attributions of situational causes “external attributions”. Assume that your friend is late picking you up for the movies. You could either decide that her lateness was due to something about her (“she’s always late”, “she doesn’t care about me”) or due to the situation (“there must have been a lot of traffic”). Internal attributions are also called dispositional attributions.

People tend to prefer to make internal attributions about others. Again, this makes things easier for us. If I decide that my friend’s lateness is due to her personality, I know to expect her to be late in the future as well. Otherwise, I’d never know whether to be ready on time or not. If you think about the latest media scandal, most likely people are attributing the actions of those involved to internal, rather than external factors. For example, in the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal, people talk about how Clinton is a philanderer or how Lewinsky was a groupie seeking excitement from seducing the President. You rarely hear people talk about situational factors that may have contributed to their alleged trysts, however, such as the stresses of the Presidential office, possible relationship problems on either side, or loneliness. Personal factors seem to be preferred both because that’s what we see (the person vs. their situation) and because people, especially Westerners, tend not to correct sufficiently for the situation.

There are particular biases in attribution that researchers have studied. The first of these, the fundamental attribution error, we learned about in the first class. This bias is that we tend, especially in Western societies, to overestimate the extent to which behavior is due to traits. We overuse internal attributions. If a server in a restaurant is nasty to me, I may assume it is because she is a nasty person. It takes more effort to think about possible situational reasons why she is acting nastily (she’s been working for 10 hours, she was mugged on the way to work, etc.), and people usually don’t put in this effort..

This fundamental attribution error only seems to apply to other people’s behavior, however. We believe that when other people act nasty it is because they’re just nasty people, but when we act rude, it’s because we’re having a bad day. Check the numbers in the columns you added above. If you are like most people, your “friend” number will be higher than your “me” number. We see traits in other people more often than in ourselves. This is called the actor-observer effect.

Again, this is qualified by another bias. Westerners (at least) are particularly likely to attribute negative behaviors or traits in ourselves as due to the situation, but positive ones as due to internal causes. If you ask a large group of Americans to rate their sense of humor, almost no one will say that theirs is below average, with the majority of people answering 5, 6, or 7 on the scale above. This is impossible using the law of averages, of course, but we tend to think that we have positive traits. It protects our self-esteem. This is called the better-than-average effect.

We also discussed defensive attributions. People tend to believe that good things will happen to them and bad things won’t. People rate their chances of having a good job and happy marriage as being above average, but getting cancer as below average. People also have a tendency toward a belief in a just world. People want to believe that good things happen to good people and vice versa. This is another way to protect ourselves. If the rape victim somehow deserved her plight (she was dressed provocatively or in the wrong place), then we don’t have to worry about something like that happening to us. It’s a lot scarier to think that maybe random bad things just happen sometimes. As another example, what is the first thing most people want to know when they hear that someone is HIV positive? People want to know “How did she get it?” If she contracted the disease from risky sexual behavior or drug use, that gives us something to blame and a way to protect ourselves. We would never act in that way, so we are safe. It is harder to blame the victim if they are someone close to or similar to us, however, because we realize that we could be in the same situation someday. This is why prosecutors often try to make their victim seem similar to the jurors.

Other attributional biases we discussed are the self-serving bias and the hindsight bias. There are cultural effects on many of these biases, with East Asians tending to do more of some (hindsight) and less of others (fundamental attribution error) compared to Westerners. Some studies have also shown that East Asians are less likely to do self-serving biases, but a meta-analysis showed that Koreans made self-serving biases to the same extent as Americans. Asians tend to focus more on the context (vs. object) than Westerners. These cultural effects may be due to different philosophical traditions and/or due to differences in the extent to which Asian vs. Western environments are “busy.”

Objectives

1. Distinguish between automatic and controlled thinking
2. Describe what a schema is, when we are likely to have schemas about certain things, and what the functions of a schema are.

3. Explain the problems with schemas, including their effects on first impressions and our processing of counter-attitudinal information.

4. Identify what a self-fulfilling prophesy is and why it occurs (when it’s most likely to occur). Describe research on the self-fulfilling prophesy.

5. Describe other nonconscious effects on our behavior.

6. Explain counterfactual thinking.

7. List the six major cross-cultural emotional expressions.

8. Differentiate between display rules and emblems and give examples of each.

9. Differentiate between personal and situational attributions.

10. Define and be able to identify attributional biases such as the fundamental attribution error, actor-observer effect, self-serving biases, better-than-average effect, defensive optimism, hindsight bias, and just world beliefs.

11. Explain how culture can affect our judgments of others and our use of attributional biases. Why do these seem to occur?

12. Explain what implicit personality theory is and how it can be affected by culture.

13. Explain the ultimate attribution error.

### Topic 4

Our final topic deals with another dark human phenomenon, prejudice. Much of what you’ll be reading draws on now familiar concepts, such as self-fulfilling prophesy (Assignment 3), attribution theory (Assignment 4), and social learning theory (Assignment 11).

Before we begin, take a moment and list all the groups you can think of which are objects of prejudice.

You probably had no trouble coming up with groups that are stereotyped or victims of prejudice. You may even belong to some of those groups yourself. Others, you may hold prejudices towards. Prejudice is a negative feeling one has about someone else based solely on their group membership. Though the blatant prejudice against groups such as women and ethnic minorities has decreased somewhat in this country, the negative effects of prejudice are still very much with us. In this country as well as in others, people act differently toward certain groups than they do towards others, and sometimes this prejudice reaches the level of deadly violence. Hopefully this chapter will make you think about your own prejudices and how you can reduce them.

Prejudice is an attitude, and, if you remember from Assignment 7, there are three components to an attitude. Prejudice is the affective or feeling component. Stereotyping is the cognitive or belief component, and, finally, discrimination is the behavioral component.

What causes prejudice? Remember the sociobiological perspective? It predicts that prejudice is innate. There is survival value in being wary of dissimilar others. While biology may contribute to prejudice, it is certainly not the whole story. Prejudice is often based on non-obvious factors such as religion, occupation, or nationality. You can’t tell whether an Irish person is Catholic or Protestant just by looking at her, but these groups have long-standing prejudices against each other. Jane Elliot’s classroom demonstration shows that prejudice can be easy and quickly created based on trivial differences such as eye color.

The way we think also contributes to prejudice. We have a tendency to categorize people into groups. Remember from Assignment 3 that this can have some positive benefits—categorization and schemas make our world easier to handle. The negative effects, however, are that categorization can lead to an ingroup-bias, a positive feeling toward our own group or in-group, and a negative feeling toward other groups, out-groups. As in Ms. Elliot’s demonstration, categorization, even on trivial characteristics, can lead to this bias for our own group and against all others.

Out-group homogeneity is another negative consequence of our tendency to categorize. While we realize that people within our own group differ from each other, we tend to believe that people in the out-group are very similar. Perhaps you’ve sometimes felt that way about the opposite sex—that they are “all alike”.

Finally, illusory correlation is a mechanism for perpetuating stereotypes. Remember from Assignment 3 that we tend to remember things that are constant with our schemas (stereotypes in this case) and forget the incosistent. This can lead us to erroneously believe there is a relationship between two events even when there is not. For example, if we hold a stereotype about the elderly being poor drivers, we may remember those instances when we see elderly people driving poorly, but not remember or even notice those times we passed elderly people driving well.

Because of our social cognitive biases, disconfirming evidence does not always work to reduce our stereotypes. Just because we see one elderly person driving well doesn’t mean that we will change our stereotype. We may consider him an exception. The text discusses three methods that can be used in presenting disconfirming evidence and illustrates which of these will be most effective in dispelling stereotypes.

Attribution theory (Assignment 4) also offers insight into the causes of prejudice. One of the reasons people are so quick to stereotype is that we prefer to make dispositional attributions about others. At the group level, this leads to the ultimate attribution error. Note how the fear of negative attributions about their group can sometimes cause members of minorities to perform more poorly through stereotype vulnerability. Faulty attributions can also perpetuate stereotypes through a tendency to blame the victim. Self-fulfilling prophesies are to blame for some of the prejudice in our society. Remember Rosenthal and Jacobson’s study of the “intellectual bloomers” (Assignment 3)? Those students who were expected to succeed, did. The opposite also occurs—students who are not expected to succeed generally don’t. Think about how experiences in schools, models on television, and reports from the media could lead to self-fulfilling prophesies of underacheivement in some minority groups.

Another perspective, realistic conflict theory, points to the role of competition as a basis for prejudice. This theory says that limited resources lead to intergroup conflict and increased prejudice and discrimination. As evidence, conflict between ethnic groups increases when jobs are scarce. Muzafir Sherif and colleagues’ Robber’s cave experiment decribed in the text illustrates this phenomenon.

Finally, we revisit social learning theory, this time to explain prejudice. Children learn their prejudices from their parents. As adults, we also learn what is acceptable from those around us. If you have lived in more than one region of the country (or world), you have probably noticed different norms regarding prejudice. I have observed (though not scientifically) that prejudice in the South manifests itself in different ways than in the Northeast or Midwest. I noticed more verbal racism when I lived in North Carolina, but less behavioral racism. Though some people made racist remarks, they were still willing to live, work, and hold acquaintanceships with people of different ethnic groups. In other places I’ve lived, people were less likely to make racist remarks, but more likely to act in a prejudiced manner. Social norms dictate which behaviors are acceptable and which are not.

The two sets of items below, from McConahay, Hardee, and Batts’ Old-Fashioned and Modern Racism scales (1981), demonstrate some of the ways in which racism has changed over time. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored.

#### Old-Fashioned Racism

1. Black people are generally not as smart as whites.

2. I favor laws that permit black persons to rent or purchase houseing even when the person offering the property for sale or rent does not wish to rent or sell it to blacks.\*

3. Generally speaking, I favor full racial integration.\*

4. I am opposed to open or fair housing laws.

5. It is a bad idea for blacks and whites to marry one another.

6. If I black family with about the same income and education as I have moved next door, I would mind it a great deal.

7. It was wrong for the United States Supreme Court to outlaw segregation in its 1954 decision.

#### Modern Racism

1. Discrimination against blacks is not longer a problem in the United States.

2. It is easy to understand the anger of black people in America.\*

3. Blacks have more influence upson school desegregation plans than they ought to have.

4. Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.

5. Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted.

6. Over the past few years, blacks, have gotten more economically than they deserve.

7. Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to blacks than they deserve.

How are old-fashioned and modern racism different? What are the social norms regarding racism where you live?

We’ve now mentioned several causes of prejudice, but what about the cures? Can prejudice be prevented, or at least lessened? Contact is often cited as a “cure” for prejudice, but research has shown that it’s not always effective. Simply bringing two groups into contact with each other may actually increase negative feelings. There are six conditions which must be met in order for contact to reduce prejudice.

1. Mutual interdependence. The members of the different groups must be dependent on each other in order for their joint goal to be reached.

2. Common goal. There must be a common goal that both groups are working towards.

3. Equal status. The two group members must have equal status within the larger group.

4. Friendly, informal setting. The setting should be friendly and informal so that group members can get to know each other.

5. Exposure to multiple individuals withing a group. Each group must be exposed to several members of their out-group. If they only come into contact with one member, it is easier for any positive attitudes to be chalked up to he or she being “an exception”.

6. Social norms promoting equality. There should be social norms in place encouraging equality.

The text describes how Elliot Aronson and his colleagues have put these conditions to work to reduce prejudice at multi-ethnic schools using the jigsaw classroom.

Another way to reduce prejudice is by teaching equality. Most parents don’t want their children to grow up with prejudiced attitudes, but parents may not realize what they are passing on to their children. For example, I recently overhead one woman who I’m sure would claim that she is not prejudiced talking to her ten-year-old daughter. The daughter said that today was Shaniqua’s birthday. The mother responded, “Who is that? She’s not a friend of yours, is she?” with an obvious distaste. The mother may not realize it, but she was teaching her daughter that some children (those with African-American sounding names) should not be played with.

A final method for reducing prejudice is to use recategorization. We talked earlier about how we tend to categorize people and stereotype against the out-group. But if we broaden our in-group, the out-group becomes smaller. When I travel within the Midwest, I tend to think of myself as a Iowan, and when I travel to another region of the United States, as a Midwesterner. But when I travel to foreign countries, my dominant in-group is that of American. I feel I have something in common with any American I meet. I have recategorized. The movie Independence Day provides another good example of recategorization. When the world is threatened by an alien force, countries that had previously been fighting against each other banned together against this new common foe. People changed their in-group from “American” or “Spaniard” or “Iraqi” to “World Citizen”.

Objectives

1. Distinguish between prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination and relate these concepts to the three parts of an attitude.

1. Explain 2 personality variables that seem to relate to prejudice.

3. Explain how social categorization leads to prejudice. Define the in-group bias. Explain how outgroup homogeneity contributes to stereotyping. What is the minimal groups paradigm? Explain the blue eyes/brown eyes study.

4. Identify illusory correlation. Explain how implicit attitudes, priming, and attributions can affect stereotypes and prejudice.

5. Explain how self-esteem can relate to prejudice using social identity theory.

6. Distinguish between old-fashioned and symbolic/modern and aversive/ambivalent racism/sexism.

7. Explain the justification/suppression model. When will people do one vs. the other?

8. Explain realistic conflict theory and the Robber’s Cave study.

9. Identify and define the factors that lead to prejudice according to the integrated threat model.

10. Explain the following effects of prejudice: stereotype threat, self-fulfilling prophesy, and the weapons bias.

11. Explain several possible ways to reduce prejudice.

12. Identify the six conditions that are necessary for contact to reduce prejudice.

13. Explain how the jigsaw classroom works and the benefits of the program.

14. Explain how the common ingroup identity model works to reduce prejudice.

15. Explain the IAT—how it works and what it shows.

### Topic 5

Now we turn to how we use social cognition to understand our own, rather than others’, behavior. How do we think about ourselves? One of the core concepts of this chapter is the self-concept. The self-concept is our “self”—it’s our perception of our thoughts, beliefs, and personality. Take a moment and complete these statements about yourself.

I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

How did you describe yourself? Humans seem to develop a self-concept by around age two. Researchers determine this by using the blue dot test described in the text. Other signs that an individual has a self-concept include calling attention to their own appearance, likes and dislikes, or actions and recognizing themselves in pictures. Generally a self-concept begins with physical self-recognition (“that’s me in the mirror”) and progresses to self-description (“I’m a pretty girl”) and on to the emotional responses related to self-evaluations (“I’m proud of myself for getting a “A” in that course”). As children grow older, they generally put less emphasis on physical characteristics when describing themselves and more on psychological states and ways others judge us.

So how do we get to know ourselves? One way is introspection—just looking inside of ourselves. Self-awareness theory deals with what happens when we focus on ourselves in this way. Research on self-awareness theory has shown that when people focus on themselves (some ways they cause people to focus on themselves are by placing a mirror, videocamera, or audience in front of them), they evaluate their actions according to their internal moral codes. Being aware that you’re not acting consistent with your internal standards and values is uncomfortable—if you can change your behavior to be consistent you will. If that’s not possible, you’ll try to escape the self-aware state.

Introspection can be uncomfortable. Even if we are not in conflict with our internal states, being constantly self-aware can be hard. Roy Baumeister has studied how people “escape from self” and suggests that alcohol, binge eating, masochism, suicide, and religious expression are all ways that some people use to escape from their sense of self. People who have high stress jobs and must always be aware of themselves (such as politicians) seem more likely to use the extreme variants of escape, since the more mild ones like reading or watching TV may not work for them. Introspection can also be wrong, as Tim Wilson’s research on thinking about reasons shows.

Introspection, then, may not be the best way to know ourselves. What other alternatives are there? Stanley Schachter’s two-factor theory of emotion suggests that sometimes we look to the environment to tell us how we feel. He believed that two conditions were necessary for feeling emotion. First, we must feel physiological arousal. Then we look for a label for that arousal. If we are aroused and look down and there’s a rattlesnake crossing our path, we may interpret the arousal as fear. If we look down and see a baby playing, we may interpret the arousal as joy. Schachter and Singer’s seminal study testing this theory is described in the book. As an aside, Stanley Schachter is my academic “grandfather”. He was the dissertation advisor of my advisor, Bibb Latané, who played the part of “Mr. Happy” in the Schachter and Singer study.

One of the applications of Schachter and Singer’s theory is misattribution of arousal (tested in another well-known study by Donald Dutton and Art Aron). It’s easy to spot misattribution of arousal in adventures movies. The man and woman go through some exciting and traumatic event together (the ill-fated bus ride in Speed, the plane crash and pirate attack in Six Days, Seven Nights, etc.), and then, even though they hardly know each other, they fall passionately into each others’ arms by the end of the movie. This is classical misattribution of arousal. They are excited by the dangerous events going on around them (feeling arousal), and then, looking around and noticing an attractive opposite sex person, they attribute that arousal (wrongly) to love or lust. Learning about social psychology may make you a little less of a romantic, but there are practical applications of this theory that you can use if you’re so inclined. To get misattribution of arousal to work for you, take your love interest to a scary or exciting movie, on a harrowing roller coaster ride, or out for a triple latte. He or she may (mis)attribute some of the arousal they feel to their feelings for you!

Bem’s self-perception theory builds on Schachter’s work. Bem suggests that not only do we look to the environment to label our emotions, but we may look to the outside to determine our attitudes as well. If someone asks you if your roommate likes country music, you may think for a second about how often he listens to it. Self-perception theory says that you may sometimes do the same when someone asks you if you like country music. Looking to our actions to determine our attitudes is most likely when we are uncertain about our true feelings (we don’t have a schema for ourselves on that trait) and if the behaviors we are observing are freely chosen. If you know you only listen to country music because your roommate forces you to, you won’t assume that you like it.

One of the most important applications of Bem’s theory is in the area of motivation. It suggests that if we are trying to figure out why we are doing something, we may look to see if we are controlling the behavior or not. If we are only studying because our mother makes us, then we will assume that we aren’t doing it because we like it. The overjustification effect suggests that giving people rewards for doing something that they already enjoy doing for internal reasons will decrease their intrinsic interest in doing that task. Reading programs that reward children for each book they read may have the unwanted effect of decreasing the reading enjoyment of some children. Be sure to note how to decrease this effect.

In Assignment 3, we talked about schemas and how we can have schemas about ourselves. Hazel Markus has done a great deal of research on self-schemas. People are schematic or have a clear sense of self on some domains and not on others. The descriptions of yourself you provided above may represent traits that you are schematic on. People tend to be more extreme (rating themselves as “very generous” for example) and certain of traits on which they hold schemas. Again, these self-schemas help us think about ourselves. If you think of yourself as very generous, you are likely to be able to easily remember instances in the past where you acted generously. If you do not have a self-schema for your level of shyness, however, you may have a harder time recalling times when you acted shy. These schemas about ourselves also affect our memories about things that happened to us in the past, our autobiographical memories. This is related to the controversial topic of recovered memories discussed in your text.

Another major theory that is introduced in this chapter is Leon Festinger’s social comparison theory. This theory posits that humans are driven to evaluate themselves, and, to the extent that there aren’t objective means to do so, they’ll evaluate themselves by comparing to others. In general, we are most likely to compare to similar others. If you want to know how good a tennis player you are, you will probably compare yourself to someone of about your age and tennis experience, rather than to a professional player or your six-year-old cousin. Schachter’s study on affiliation described in the text illustrates this desire to compare to similar others.

There are other times, however, when we prefer to do an upward or downward social comparison. In upward social comparison, we compare to someone who is better than us. This can help us determine a standard of excellence, or how far we have to go to be great. Downward social comparisons, comparing to someone who is worse off, can help us to feel better about ourselves. Think about a recent time when you have done lateral (similar other), upward, and downward social comparisons and how each of these made you feel.

#### Type of social comparison Social comparison event Emotions experienced

Lateral—

Upward--

Downward—

The final topic in this chapter is self-presentation, the way we present ourselves to others. We practice impression management when we want to make a certain impression on others. We do this by the way we dress, how we carry ourselves, and what we say. Two strategies, ingratiation and self-handicapping, are described in the text. You may want to take the following quiz to learn something about your own impression management strategies.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements as a description of the kind of person you think you are most of the time. Answer using the following scale by putting the number corresponding to your answer in the blank to the left of each item.

0=disagree very much

1= disagree pretty much

2=disagree a little

3=agree a little

4=agree pretty much

5=agree very much

\_\_\_\_1. When I do something wrong, my first impulse is to blame circumstances.

\_\_\_\_2. I tend to put things off until the last moment.

\_\_\_\_3. I tend to overprepare when I have an exam or any kind of “performance”.

\_\_\_\_4. I suppose I feel “under the weather” more often than most people.

\_\_\_\_5. I always try to do my best, no matter what.

\_\_\_\_6. Before I sign up for a course or engage in any important activity, I make sure I have the proper preparation or background.

\_\_\_\_7. I tend to get very anxious before an exam or “performance”.

\_\_\_\_8. I am easily distracted by noises or my own creative thoughts when I try to read.

\_\_\_\_9. I try not to get too intensely involved in competitive activities so it won’t hurt too much if I lose or do poorly.

\_\_\_\_10. I would rather be respected for doing my best than admired for my potential.

\_\_\_\_11. I would do a lot better if I tried harder.

\_\_\_\_12. I prefer small pleasures in the present to larger pleasures in the dim future.

\_\_\_\_13. I generally hate to be in any condition but “at my best”.

\_\_\_\_14. Someday I might “get it all together”.

\_\_\_\_15. I sometimes enjoy being mildly ill for a day or two because it takes off the pressure.

\_\_\_\_16. I would do much better if I did not let my emotions get in the way.

\_\_\_\_17. When I do poorly at one kind of thing, I often console myself by remembering I am good at other things.

\_\_\_\_18. I admit that I am tempted to rationalize when I don’t live up to others’ expectations.

\_\_\_\_19. I often think I have more than my share of bad luck in sports, card games, and other measures of talent.

\_\_\_\_20. I would rather not take any drugs that interfered with my ability to think clearly and do the right thing.

\_\_\_\_21. I overindulge in food and drink more than I should.

\_\_\_\_22. When something important is coming up, like an exam or a job interview, I try to get as much sleep as possible the night before.

\_\_\_\_23. I never let emotional problems in one part of my life interfere with other things in my life.

\_\_\_\_24. Usually, when I get anxious about doing well, I end up doing better.

\_\_\_\_25. Sometimes I get so depressed that even easy tasks become difficult.

To score your responses, reverse score items 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20, 22, and 23. For those items, 0=5, 1=4, 2=3, 3=2, 4=1, 5=0. Then add those numbers to the ratings you gave the other items. Your score should be somewhere between 0 and 125.

This scale is called the Self-Handicapping Scale and was developed by Edward Jones and Frederick Rhodewalt (1982). The scale measures how much an individual uses self-handicapping strategies—strategies can lead you to attribute failure to external causes. If your score is in the high range, you are likely to engage in self-handicapping partially as a way to protect your self-esteem if you do poorly on a task that is important to you.

Rate each of these items on the following scale:

1=Strongly disagree

2=Moderately disagree

3=Moderately agree

4=Strongly agree

\_\_\_1. Our country needs to address the growing number of homeless persons.

\_\_\_2. It is a good idea to floss your teeth daily.

\_\_\_3. The right to vote is one of the most valuable rights of American citizens.

\_\_\_4. Eating a variety of foods each day, including five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, contributes to good health.

Now turn the page.

Answer yes or no to these questions:

1. Do you personally do anything to help the homeless (e.g., volunteer at a homeless shelter or donate money)? \_\_\_\_

2. Do you floss your teeth everyday? \_\_\_\_

3. Did you vote in the last election for which you were eligible? \_\_\_\_

4. Do you regularly eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day? ­­­­\_\_\_\_

Were your attitudes and behaviors in line with each other? If not, how did it make you feel? A little hypocritical, maybe? The negative arousal we feel when we realize that our attitudes or behaviors aren’t consistent with each other is called cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory is one of the main topics in this assignment.

We’ve been talking so far about how we know ourselves and others primarily using the social cognition approach. In this assignment, we move on to the self-esteem approach. The theories in this chapter deal with ways in which we try to maintain our self-esteem and feel good about ourselves. We sometimes reinterpret our world to make ourselves feel better. Are there things that you do even though you know they are bad for you? How do you deal with thinking of yourself as a smart person and still doing this probably-not-so-smart thing? One way I rationalize eating chocolate (which isn’t so good for you) is by reminding myself that it has calcium in it, and calcium is good for me. I could also react by never eating chocolate, by deciding that chocolate really isn’t bad for me, or by telling myself that cancer will kill me before the chocolate ever does.

Cognitive dissonance theory deals with responses to inconsistencies, such as eating foods we know are bad for us. It was first formulated by Leon Festinger (remember him from social comparison theory in the last assignment?). The theory was later expanded by Elliot Aronson, the senior author of your textbook. Cognitive dissonance theory says that whenever we do or learn something that threatens our image of ourselves, we will feel dissonance and be driven to reduce that negative feeling by retaining consistency. Whenever we do something that surprises us, makes us feel stupid, or makes us feel guilty, we’re likely to feel dissonance. We can respond to this inconsistency by changing our attitude, changing our behavior, changing our thoughts about the behavior, or making the inconsistency less important. If I believe in animal rights and someone gives me a fur coat, I may feel dissonance. I could respond by changing my attitudes about animal rights, getting rid of the coat, deciding that the animal is already dead now and I didn’t buy the coat anyway, or deciding that animal rights isn’t that important of an issue to me anymore. In general, we’ll choose whichever of these options is the easiest for us at the time.

Cognitive dissonance theory is one of the most researched theories in social psychology, with applications to lots of different types of behavior. We use cognitive dissonance tactics to justify behaviors that don’t fit with our attitudes (notice some of the applications to sales, condom use, war, and making people like us). We also use it to justify choices that we make. If you have two options of who to marry and you choose one, you’ll feel better about yourself and your choice if you remind yourself of all the good things about the chosen one and the bad things about the rejected one. Dissonance also applies to how we justify our efforts. Social groups that make new members perform humiliating acts (such as some fraternities and military organizations) use cognitive dissonance theory to their advantage, causing their members to become more dedicated to the group.

There is also a discounting application to cognitive dissonance theory. We talked about the overjustification effect in the last assignment—how being rewarded for doing something we like can cause our intrinsic motivation for that activity to decrease. Cognitive dissonance theory describes insufficient punishment as an almost opposite motivational application. If we don’t have an external reason for doing something, we may think that we must have done it because we enjoyed it (thus reducing our dissonance). Inducing children to perform activities, such as picking up litter or playing nicely with their brother, with a minimum of reward or punishment can lead them to internalize the activity, enjoying it for its own sake (and requiring less reminders from you to do it).

Objectives

1. Identify what a self-concept is, when it develops, and how it changes over time. Describe how research tests whether babies and animals have self-concepts.

2. Describe how the concept of self differs in Western and Eastern cultures. Define Hofstede’s dimensions (especially individualism-collectivism) and how those differ by culture.

3. Explain some of the problems of introspection as a method of knowing ourselves.

4. Explain self-awareness theory and how a self-aware state can be induced. Explain self-discrepancy theory.

5. Discuss how thinking about reasons can affect our attitudes.

6. Explain self-perception theory.

7. Differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

8. Explain the overjustification effect and how it relates to motivating people. Describe how to minimize the effects of rewards on intrinsic motivation.

9. Explain the steps to the two-factor theory of emotion. Relate the theory to misattribution of arousal and explain how misattribution of arousal occurs in everyday life. Describe research testing the two-factor theory and misattribution of arousal.

10. Explain social comparison theory. Discuss when we are most likely to make different kinds of comparisons and how those comparisons will make us feel.

11. Describe how people use impression management to control what others think about them. Explain seven major strategies people use.

12. Explain what self-monitoring is and how that relates to impression management.

13. Explain some effects of culture on impression management.

14. Explain how self-control functions (the effects of glucose and practice).

15. Explain what self-esteem is and describe some positive and negative effects of it (including narcissism).

16. Explain the theory of cognitive dissonance, including the causes of dissonance and the ways in which dissonance can be reduced.

17. Explain how inducing hypocrisy and insufficient punishment can lead to changed attitudes.