CHAPTER 15

Social Psychology

Lecture Overview

• Social Cognition
• Social Influence
• Social Relations
• Applying Social Psychology to Social Problems

Introductory Definition

Social Psychology: scientific study of how people’s thoughts, feelings, & actions are affected by others
Our Thoughts About Others

• **Attributions**: explanations for behaviors or events

• To determine the cause, we first decide whether the behavior comes from an:
  • *internal (dispositional)* cause, such as personal characteristics, or
  • *external (situational)* cause, such as situational demands.

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Our Thoughts About Others: Mistaken Attributions

1. **Fundamental Attribution Error**: misjudging causes of others’ behavior as stemming from *internal* (dispositional) vs. *external* (situational) causes
   • Saliency bias may help explain this focus on dispositional causes.

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Our Thoughts About Others: Mistaken Attributions

• **Self-Serving Bias**: favoring internal attributions for our successes & externalizing our failures

"blaming the victim"
  Actor - Observer
Our Thoughts About Others

• **Attitude**: learned predisposition to respond cognitively, affectively, & behaviorally to a particular object in a particular way

**Attitude toward unwanted pregnancy**

- **Cognitive element** (believes fetus is feeling, growing human being.)
- **Affective element** (fears life changes of being teen parent)
- **Behavior element** (has baby and gives baby up for adoption)

Our Thoughts About Others: Cognitive Dissonance

• **Cognitive Dissonance**: feeling of discomfort caused by a discrepancy between two conflicting thoughts or between an attitude & a behavior

Our Thoughts About Others: Cognitive Dissonance (Continued)

- People are motivated to maintain consistency in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- When inconsistency is experienced between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they can lead to...
- Strong tension and discomfort (cognitive dissonance)
- To reduce the discomfort, individuals may change an attitude or behavior.
Our Thoughts About Others: Cognitive Dissonance Continued

• Festinger & Carlsmith’s Cognitive Dissonance Study. Participants given VERY boring tasks to complete, & then paid either $1 or $20 to tell next participant the task was “very enjoyable” & “fun.”

• Result?

Those paid $1 experienced greater cognitive dissonance, & therefore changed their attitude more than those paid $20.

Pause & Reflect: Assessment

1. What is the fundamental attribution error?

2. Accordin cognitive dissonance people are motivated to change their attitudes because of tension created by a discrepancy between an attitude & a behavior or between two or more competing attitudes.
Our Actions Toward Others: Social Influence

- **Conformity**: changing behavior because of real or imagined group pressure
- **Obedience**: following direct commands, usually from an authority figure
Our Actions Toward Others: Conformity

Asch’s Conformity Study
- Participants were asked to select the line closest in length to X.
- When confederates first gave obviously wrong answers (A or C), more than 1/3 of true subjects conformed & agreed with the incorrect choices.

Our Actions Toward Others: Conformity (Continued)

Why do we conform?
- Normative Social Influence: need for approval & acceptance
- Informational Social Influence: need for information & direction
- Reference Groups: we conform to people we like & admire because we want to be like them

Our Actions Toward Others: Obedience

- Obedience: following a direct command, usually from an authority figure.
- Conform and obey = own best interest
- Allows safety, order, & predictability
- Sometimes it is important not to conform or obey
Our Actions Toward Others: 
Obedience

- Milgram’s obedience study: Participants serving as “teachers” were ordered to continue shocking someone with a known heart condition who is begging to be released.

- Result? 65% of “teachers” delivered highest level of shock (450 volts) to the pseudo-heart condition “learner.”

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Milgram’s Shock Generator

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Our Actions Toward Others: 
Obedience (Continued)

Major factors affecting obedience:
1. legitimacy & closeness of the authority figure
2. remoteness of the victim
3. assignment of responsibility
4. modeling/imitation
Obedience

- Socialization
- Foot-in-the-door technique
- Relaxed moral guard
- Dissent

Pause & Reflect: Critical Thinking

- How would you have behaved if you were a “teacher” in Milgram’s obedience studies? Would you have given the highest level of shocks? What about your best friend or parents? Would their behavior differ from yours? Why & how?
Group Processes: “Power of the Situation”

Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Study

- Students were randomly assigned to play the role of either “prisoner” or “guard.”
- Original study, scheduled for 2 weeks, was stopped after 6 days due to serious psychological changes in both “prisoners” & “guards.”

Our Actions Toward Others: Group Processes

- Group membership involves:
  - **Roles**: set of behavioral patterns connected with particular social positions
  - **Deindividuation**: anonymity leads to reduced inhibition, self-consciousness, & personal responsibility

Group Processes: Problems with Decision Making

- **Group Polarization**: group movement toward either a riskier or more conservative decision; result depends on the members’ initial dominant tendency
- **Groupthink**: faulty decision making occurring when a highly cohesive group seeks agreement & avoids inconsistent information
Our Actions Toward Others: Group Processes (Continued)

Symptoms of Groupthink:
- Illusion of invulnerability
- Belief in group’s morality
- Collective rationalizations
- Stereotypes of out-groups
- Self-censorship
- Illusion of unanimity
- Direct pressure on dissenters

Pause & Reflect: Assessment

1. Groupthink: faulty decision making.
   - Group polarization: behavior toward one extreme.
2. Gradual increase in requests toward ultimate goal
3. Normative social influence
   - Informational social influence
   - Reference groups

Our Feelings About Others: Prejudice & Discrimination

- **Prejudice**: learned, generally negative, attitude toward members of a group
- **Discrimination**: negative actions directed toward members of a group
An African American is denied a job because he is black.

Prejudice and discrimination can exist without discrimination, and vice versa.

Three Components of Prejudice

1. **Cognitive** (thoughts associated with objects of prejudice)
   - Stereotype: set of beliefs about the characteristics of people in a group generalized to all group members
2. **Affective** (feelings associated with objects of prejudice)
3. **Behavioral** (actions associated with objects of prejudice)
   - Discrimination: negative behaviors directed at members of a group

Pause & Reflect: Assessment

1. Briefly explain how prejudice differs from discrimination.
Sources of Prejudice & Discrimination

- Learning
- Mental Shortcuts
- Economic & Political Competition for Limited Resources
- Displaced Aggression ("scapegoating")

Sources of Prejudice: Learning

- Classical and operant conditioning
- Social learning
- Direct experience
- Generalizing a single negative experience

Sources of Prejudice: Mental Shortcuts

- Implicit Bias: prejudice occurs without conscious awareness or control
- Implicit Bias: hidden attitude activated by the mere encounter of an attitude object; may serve as a guide to behaviors independent of a person's awareness & control
Sources of Prejudice

- Mental Shortcuts - continued
  - Ingroup Favoritism: ingroup viewed more positively than outgroup
  - Outgroup Homogeneity Effect: outgroup judged as less diverse than ingroup
- Competition for limited resources
- Displaced aggression
  - scapegoat

Pause & Reflect:
Critical Thinking

- Do you believe you are free of prejudice? Would you be friends &/or date people within all ethnic groups? If you’re heterosexual, would you share a college dorm room with someone who is gay or lesbian? Why or why not?

Pause & Reflect:
Psychology & Life

- Psychology provides scientific research & insight into social problems, like prejudice & destructive obedience. Psychologists also produce concrete suggestions for reducing these problems.
Applying Social Psychology to Social Problems

• Prejudice & Discrimination
• Destructive Obedience

How can we reduce prejudice & discrimination?
- Encourage cooperation & common goals
- Intergroup contact
- Cognitive retraining
- Employ cognitive dissonance

How can we reduce destructive obedience?
1. Adjust socialization toward obedience
2. Recognize power of the situation
3. Protect against groupthink
4. Avoid foot-in-the-door technique: making a small request followed by increasingly larger requests
5. Guard against relaxed moral guard
6. Increase disobedient models
Our Actions Toward Others: Aggression

- Aggression: any behavior intended to harm someone

Our Actions Toward Others: Aggression (Continued)

- Biological factors in aggression:
  - instincts, genes, brain & nervous system, substance abuse & other mental disorders, hormones, & neurotransmitters

Aggression

- Psychosocial factors in aggression:
  - substance/alcohol abuse
  - aversive stimuli
  - culture & learning
  - frustration
  - violent media/video games
Our Actions Toward Others: Aggression (Continued)

How can we control or reduce aggression?

- Catharsis? (Doesn’t really work)
- Introduce incompatible responses (e.g., humor)
- Improve social & communication skills

Our Actions Toward Others: Altruism

- Altruism: actions designed to help others with no obvious benefit to the helper

Our Actions Toward Others: Altruism

- Why do we help?
  - Evolutionary Model: favors survival of one’s genes
  - Egoistic Model: helping motivated by anticipated gain
  - Empathy-Altruism Model: helping motivated by empathy
Our Actions Toward Others: Altruism

Why Don’t We Help?

- Latane & Darley’s Diffusion 5-Step model
  - Diffusion of Responsibility: dilution, or diffusion, of personal responsibility

Latane & Darley’s 5-Step Decision Process for Helping

Are you likely to help?

Is it unclear if the person needs help? **ASK!**
Pause & Reflect: Assessment

1. Name some of the factors in aggression.

2. What are the best ways to reduce aggression & increase altruism?

Our Feelings About Others: Interpersonal Attraction

• Interpersonal Attraction: positive feelings toward another

• Three Key Factors:
  ➢ Physical Attractiveness
  ➢ Proximity: geographic closeness
  ➢ Similarity: in values
**Our Feelings About Others: Interpersonal Attraction**

- **Romantic Love:** intense attraction & excitement
- **Companionate Love:** lasting attraction based on admiration, respect, trust, caring, & commitment

**Pause & Reflect: Assessment**

1. Romantic: mystery and fantasy
   Companionate: strong and lasting

2. Physical attractiveness
   Proximity
   Similarity

3. Intimacy
   Passion
   Commitment
Pause & Reflect: Critical Thinking

- Chapter 15 is often the last chapter covered in a general psychology course. If this is true for you, stop & take the time to list the TOP 5 to 10 concepts or terms that you want to remember & possibly apply in your everyday life.