

# PSYC 221

# Introduction to General Psychology

Session 10 – Social and community Psychology

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# Session Overview

- Social psychology focuses on understanding human interactions that include communication, cooperation, competition, leadership and attitudes development. Social psychologists also study how individuals behave in relationship to others and the influences of group on the individuals' behavior. In this session, we will focus on psychological concepts such as conformity, obedience, compliance as well as group dynamics.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Social thinking
- Social influence
- Social relations
- Attraction
- Altruism



# Reading List

- Chapter 14 of Feldman (2007), Essentials of understanding psychology;
- Chapter 15 of Myers (2008), Exploring psychology;
- Chapter 7 of Akotia and Mate-Kole (2014), Contemporary psychology: Readings from Ghana



Topic One

# **SOCIAL THINKING**



# Social thinking

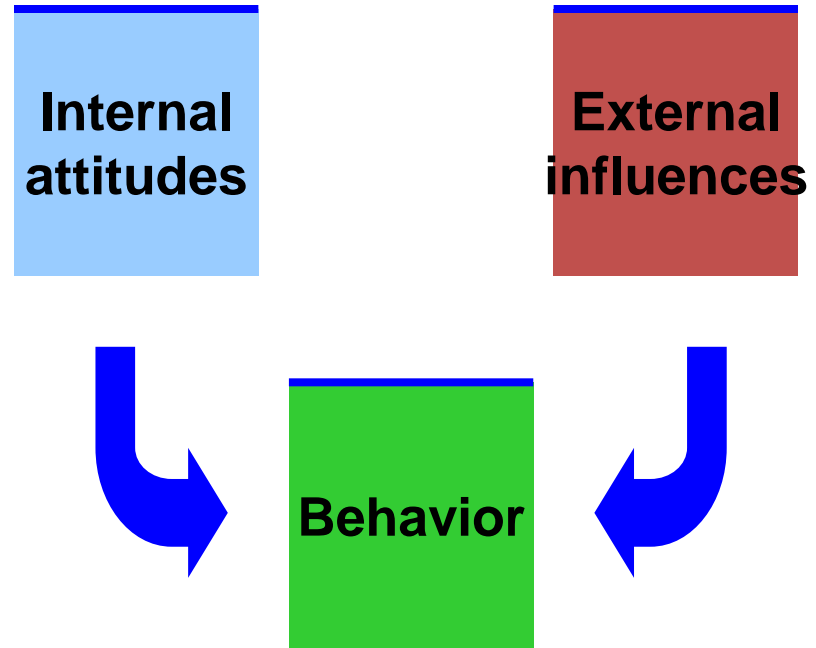
- Social Psychology is the scientific study of how we think about, influence, and relate to one another.
- How do we tend to explain others' and our own behavior?
- **Social thinking** involves thinking about others, especially when they engage in doing things that are unexpected.
- Fritz Heider (1958) proposed the **attribution theory**.
- Heider (1958) noted that people usually attribute others' behavior either to their internal dispositions or to external situations.
- A teacher may wonder whether a child's hostility reflects an aggressive personality (*dispositional attribution*) or is a reaction to stress or abuse (*a situational attribution*).

# Social thinking

- Although we are sometimes right when explaining people's behavior mistakes can be made in the process
- This error is called the **fundamental attribution error** which means the tendency for observers, when analyzing another's behavior, to underestimate the impact of the situation and to overestimate the impact of personal disposition
- We are more likely to make this error when explaining behaviors of strangers we have observed in only one type of situation

# Attitudes and actions

- Does what we think predict what we will do, or does what we do shape what we will think?
- **Attitudes** are feelings and beliefs that predispose one to respond in a particular way to objects, people and events
- If we *believe* a person is mean, we may *feel* dislike for the person and *act* in an unfriendly manner.
- Our behavior is affected by our inner attitudes as well as by external social influences
- Attitudes follow behavior
- Cooperative actions feed mutual liking





# Social thinking

- Evidence of the link between attitude and behaviour
- **1. Foot-in-the-door phenomenon:** tendency for people who have first agreed to a small request to comply later with a larger request. When people are convinced to act against their beliefs, it can affect their attitudes
- Doing becomes believing
- **2. Role-playing also affect attitudes:** adopting a new role or set of expectations about a social position defines how those in the position ought to behave
- Zimbardo (1972) assigned the roles of guards and prisoners to random students and found that guards and prisoners developed role- appropriate attitudes.

# Social thinking

- Actions can affect attitudes but sometimes when we become aware that our actions and attitudes don't coincide, we experience tension/ cognitive dissonance
- According to cognitive dissonance, we act to reduce the discomfort (dissonance) we feel when two of our thoughts (cognitions) are inconsistent
- example- when we become aware that our attitudes and our actions clash, we can reduce the resulting dissonance by changing our attitudes

Topic Two

# **SOCIAL INFLUENCE**

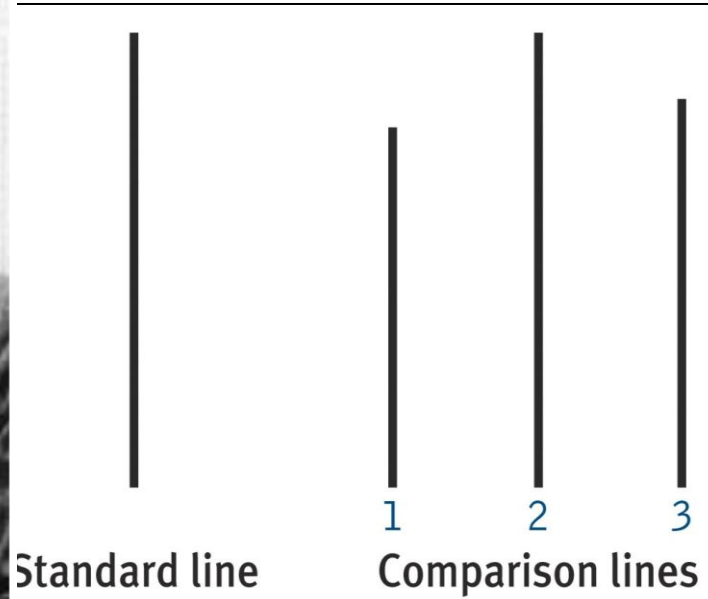


# Conformity

- The greatest contribution of social psychology is its study of attitudes, beliefs, decisions, and actions and the way they are molded by social influence.
- Behavior is contagious, modeled by one followed by another. We follow behavior of others to conform.
- Chartrand and Bargh (1999) call this the *chameleon effect*
- Other behaviors may be an expression of compliance (obedience) toward authority.
- Conformity means adjusting one's behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard.
- Researchers have conducted many experiments on how groups influence individuals

# Group pressure and conformity

## Solomon Asch's (1955) experiment



# Conditions that Strengthen Conformity

1. One is made to feel incompetent or insecure.
2. The group has at least three people.
3. The group is unanimous.
4. One admires the group's status and attractiveness.
5. One has no prior commitment or response.
6. The group observes one's behavior.
7. One's culture strongly encourages respect for a social standard.

# Reasons for conformity

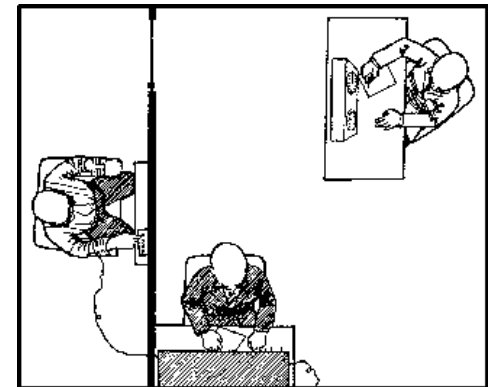
- **Normative social influence** is the influence resulting from a person's desire to gain approval or avoid disapproval.
- **Informational social influence** is the influence resulting from one's willingness to accept others' opinions about reality.



# Obedience: Milgram's study

- Stanley Milgram designed a study that investigates the effects of authority on obedience.

Both Photos: © 1965 By Stanley Milgram, from the film *Obedience*, dist. by Penn State, Media Sales



Slight (15–60)	Moderate (75–120)	Strong (135–180)	Very strong (195–240)	Intense (255–300)	Extreme intensity (315–360)	Danger: severe (375–420)	XXX (435–450)
Shock levels in volts							



# Conditions that strengthen obedience

- Milgram found that obedience was highest when:
- the person giving the orders was close at hand and was perceived to be a legitimate authority figure.
- the authority figure was supported by a prestigious institution. Compliance was somewhat lower when Milgram dissociated his experiments from Yale University.
- the victim was at a distance, even in another room.
- there were no role models for defiance; that is, no other participants were seen disobeying the experimenter.

# Group influence

- How are we influenced by people watching us or joining us in various activities?
- **Social facilitation:** Refers to improved/stronger performance on tasks in the presence of others.
- Triplett (1898) noticed cyclists' race times were faster when they competed against others than when they just raced against the clock
- Social facilitation experiments test the effect of others' presence on performance on an individual task
- **Social loafing:** refers to the tendency of an individual in a group to exert less effort toward attaining a common goal than when tested individually (Latané, 1981).

# Group influence

- Sometimes the presence of others both arouses people and diminishes their sense of responsibility.
- Deindividuation: refers to the loss of self-awareness and self-restraint in group situations that foster arousal and anonymity.
- Deindividuation allows people to behave in manners they would not
- E.g. Zimbardo (1970) found that New York University women dressed in depersonalizing Ku Klux Klan-style hoods delivered twice as much electric shock to a victim as did identifiable women

# Effects of group interaction

- Research shows that *interacting with others can similarly have both bad and good effects.*
- **Group Polarization** enhances a group's prevailing attitudes through a discussion.
- If a group is like-minded, discussion strengthens its prevailing opinions and attitudes.
- Group polarization can have beneficial results, as when it amplifies a sought-after spiritual awareness or reinforces the resolve of those in a self-help group, or strengthens feelings of tolerance in a low-prejudice group.
- But it can also have dire consequences such as when high-prejudice students discussed racial issues, they became *more prejudiced* (Bishop & Myers, 2004)

# Effects of group interaction

- Does group interaction ever distort important decisions?
- **Group think** (Janis, 1982) is a mode of thinking that occurs when the desire for harmony in a decision-making group overrides the realistic appraisal of alternatives
- Case examples include: Attack on Pearl Harbor, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, Watergate Cover-up, Chernobyl Reactor Accident
- Group think tend to influence important decision making in that it results in examination of few alternatives, selective gathering of information, pressure to conform within the group or withhold criticism, and collective rationalization

# Power of individuals

- In affirming the power of social influence, we must not overlook our power as individuals
- Social control (the power of the situation) and personal control (the power of individual) interact to determine the outcome a situation

Topic Three

# **SOCIAL RELATIONS**



# Social relations

- Social psychology also study how we relate to one another
- They study concepts such as prejudice, aggression, conflict, attraction, and altruism and peacemaking.



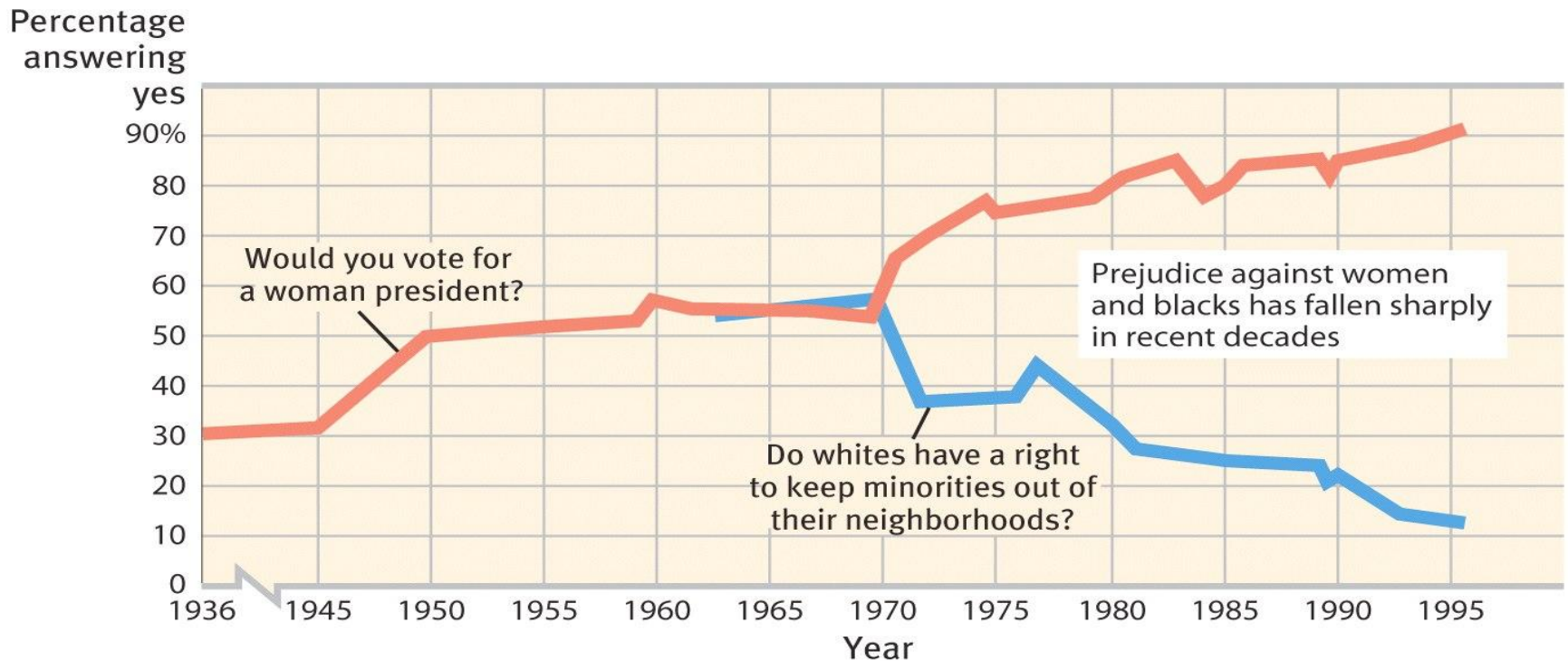


# Prejudice

- Prejudice is an unjustifiable (usually negative) attitude toward a group and its members.
- Also means prejudgment
- Prejudice is often directed towards different cultural, ethnic, or gender groups.
- Components include:
  - Beliefs (stereotypes): a generalized (sometimes accurate but often overgeneralized) belief about a group of people.
  - Emotions (hostility, envy, fear):
  - Predisposition to *act* (to discriminate): unjustifiable negative behavior toward a group or its members.

# Prejudice

- Prejudices are schemas that influence how we notice and interpret events
- Our preconceived ideas about people bias our impressions of their behavior
- Gender prejudice and discrimination and racial prejudice are common examples



# Prejudice

- Why does prejudice arise?
- Three main factors have been highlighted
  - Social Inequalities: Prejudice develops when people have money, power, and prestige, and others do not. Social inequality increases prejudice.
  - Social Divisions: **Ingroup**: People with whom one shares a common identity. **Outgroup**: Those perceived as different from one's ingroup. **Ingroup Bias**: The tendency to favor one's own group.
  - Emotional Scapegoating: Prejudice provides an outlet for anger [emotion] by providing someone to blame. After 9/11 many people lashed out against innocent Arab-Americans.

# Prejudice

- What are the cognitive roots of prejudice?
- Stereotypes are by-product of how we cognitively simplify the world as we do so through four main ways
- **Categorization:** we categorize people into groups by stereotyping them.
- **Vivid cases:** we tend to over generalize from vivid, memorable cases. For example the 9/11 terrorists attack can feed stereotypes or prejudices into thinking that terrorists are muslims but in reality, most terrorists are non-Muslims.
- **The just-world phenomenon:** The tendency of people to believe the world is just, and people get what they deserve and deserve what they get.
- **Hindsight bias:** the tendency to believe that individuals could have predicted the outcome of events beforehand may contribute to blaming the victim and forming a prejudice against them.
  - E.g. blaming rape victims for contributing to their encounter

# Aggression

- Aggression can be any physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt or destroy.
- The aggressive behavior may be done reactively out of hostility or proactively as a calculated means to an end.
- Research shows that aggressive behavior emerges from the interaction of biology and experience.
- Biological influences include:
- **Genetic Influences:** Twin studies show aggression may be genetic. In men, aggression is possibly linked to the Y chromosome.
- **Neural Influences:** Some centers in the brain, especially the limbic system (amygdala) and the frontal lobe, are intimately involved with aggression.
- **Biochemical Influences:** Hormones, alcohol, and other substances in the blood influence the neural systems that control aggression. E.g. Prenatal exposure to testosterone also increases aggression in female hyenas.



# Aggression

- What psychological factors may trigger aggressive behavior?
- Four psychological factors have been found to influence aggressive behavior
- **Dealing with aversive events:**
  - Studies in which animals and humans experience unpleasant events reveal that those made miserable often make others miserable.
  - Environmental temperature can lead to aggressive acts. Murders and rapes increased with the temperature in Houston.
  - Frustration-aggression principle: A principle in which frustration (caused by the blocking of an attempt to achieve a desired goal) creates anger, which can generate aggression.

# Aggression

- **Learning aggression is rewarding:** When aggression leads to desired outcomes, one learns to be aggressive.
  - E.g. Children whose aggression successfully intimidates other children may become more aggressive
- **Observing models of aggression:** Sexually coercive men are promiscuous and hostile in their relationships with women. This coerciveness has increased due to television viewing of R- and X-rated movies.
- **Acquiring social scripts:** The media portrays *social scripts* and generates mental tapes in the minds of the viewers. When confronted with new situations individuals may rely on such social scripts. If social scripts are violent in nature, people may act them out.

# Biopsychosocial explanation of aggression

## Biological influences:

- genetic influences
- biochemical influences, such as testosterone and alcohol
- neural influences, such as severe head injuries

## Psychological influences:

- dominating behavior (which boosts testosterone levels in the blood)
- believing you've drunk alcohol (whether you actually have or not)
- frustration
- aggressive role models
- rewards for aggressive behavior

Aggressive behavior

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graph TD; A[Biological influences] --> C[Aggressive behavior]; B[Psychological influences] --> C; D[Social-cultural influences] --> C;
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## Social-cultural influences:

- deindividuation from being in a crowd
- challenging environmental factors, such as crowding, heat, and direct provocations
- parental models of aggression
- minimal father involvement
- being rejected from a group
- exposure to violent media





Topic Four

# ATTRACTION



# Attraction

- Why do we befriend or fall in love with some people but not with others?
- There are three components of attraction, namely: Proximity, physical attractiveness and similarity
- **Proximity:** Geographic nearness is a powerful predictor of friendship. It has been found that repeated exposure to novel stimuli increases their attraction (**mere exposure effect**).
- **Physical Attractiveness:** Once proximity affords contact, the next most important thing in attraction is physical appearance.
  - Physical attractiveness predicts frequency of dating, feelings of popularity, and others' initial impressions of personalities
  - Attractive people are to be healthier, happier, more sensitive, more successful, and more socially skilled, though not more honest or compassionate
- **Similarity:** Similar views among individuals causes the bond of attraction to strengthen.



Topic Five

# ALTRUISM

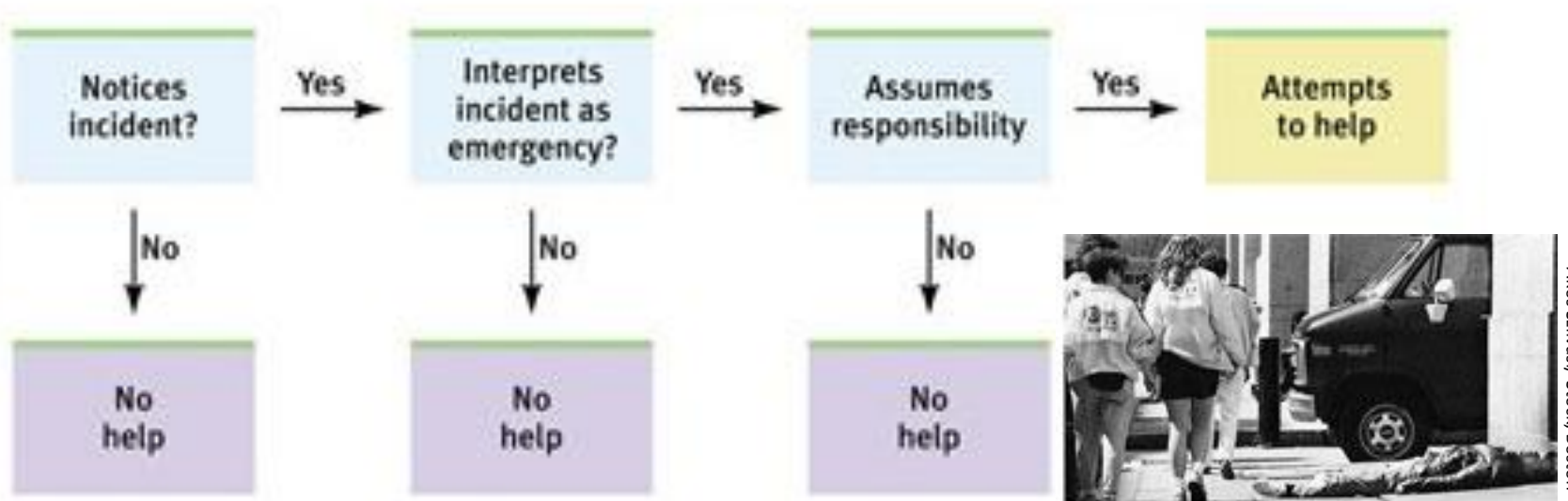


# Altruism

- Why do we help others? When are we most—and least—likely to help?
- Altruism is an unselfish regard for the welfare of others.
- Altruism became a major concern of social psychologists after an especially vile act of sexual violence
- Social psychologists wondered about factors that determine when a on-looker would most likely intervene
- The Darley and Latane (1968) found that the presence of others was the main contributing factors
- **Bystander effect** is the tendency of any given bystander to be less likely to give aid if other bystanders are present.

# Bystander Intervention

- The decision-making process for bystander intervention.
- At each step, the presence of other bystanders turned the presence of other bystanders turns people away from the path that leads to helping.



# Additional associated factors for bystander effect

- Altruism researchers have found that we are more likely to help if:
  - the person appears to need and deserve help.
  - the person is in some way similar to us.
  - we have just observed someone else being helpful.
  - we are not in a hurry.
  - we are in a small town or rural area.
  - we are feeling guilty.
  - we are focused on others and not preoccupied.
  - we are in a good mood.

# Sample Questions

- What psychological factors may trigger aggressive behavior?
- How does the mere presence of others influence our actions? How does our behavior change when we act as part of a group?



# References

Slide 40

