THE “HOMELESS” MAN

PROLOGUE

REMEMBER ERV AND FERN, Sandy’s parents, from Chapter 5? A few years ago, Fern and Erv got two free plane tickets when they were bumped from an overbooked flight. They decided to visit a city they had always wanted to see—San Francisco. Even though Fern was excited about the trip, she was also anxious about visiting the earthquake zone. Erv wasn’t especially worried about earthquakes, but he was worried about whether his old army buddy could still beat him at penny poker. Mostly, they both wanted to see the famous sights, eat seafood, wander through shops, and explore used bookstores, which was Erv’s favorite hobby.

As it turned out, Fern and Erv were both quite taken by the beauty and charm of San Francisco. But they were also disturbed by the number of homeless people they saw on the city streets, sometimes sleeping in the doorways of expensive shops and restaurants. This was especially disturbing to Fern, who has a heart of gold and is known among her family and friends for her willingness to help others, even complete strangers.

On the third morning of their San Francisco visit, Erv and Fern were walking along one of the hilly San Francisco streets near the downtown area. That’s when Fern saw a scruffy-looking man in faded jeans sitting on some steps, holding a cup. Something about his facial expression struck Fern as seeming lost, maybe dejected. Surely this was one of San Francisco’s less fortunate, Fern thought to herself. Without a moment’s hesitation, Fern rummaged through her purse, walked over to the man, and dropped a handful of quarters in his cup.

“Hey, lady! What the hell d’ya think you’re doing!?!?” the man exclaimed, jumping up.
“Oh, my! Aren’t you homeless!” Fern asked, mortified and turning bright red.

“Lady, this is my home,” the man snapped, motioning with his thumb to the house behind him. “I live here! And that’s my cup of coffee you just ruined!”

Fortunately, the “homeless” man also had a sense of humor. After fishing Fern’s quarters out of his coffee and giving them back to her, he chatted with the out-of-towners, enlightening them on the extraordinary cost of San Francisco real estate. As they parted, the not-so-homeless man ended up recommending a couple of his favorite seafood restaurants.

Like Fern, we all try to make sense out of our social environments. As we navigate the world, we constantly make judgments about the traits, motives, and goals of other people. And, like Fern, sometimes we make mistakes!

In this chapter, we will look at how we interpret our social environment, including how we form impressions of other people and explain their behavior. We’ll explore how our own behavior, including the likelihood that we will help or harm others, is influenced by the social environment and other people. In the process, we’ll come back to Erv and Fern’s incident with the “homeless” man to illustrate several important concepts.
INTRODUCTION:
What Is Social Psychology?

Why did Fern think the man on the steps was homeless? How did the “homeless” man initially interpret Fern’s efforts to help him? And in contrast to Fern, not everyone who feels compassion toward homeless people acts in accordance with that attitude. Why did Fern do so?

These are the kinds of issues that social psychologists study. Social psychology investigates how your thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by the presence of other people and by the social and physical environment. The social situations can include being alone, in the presence of others, or in front of a crowd of onlookers.

Like other psychology specialty areas, social psychology emphasizes certain concepts. For example, one important social psychology concept is that of your sense of self. Your sense of self involves you as a social being who has been shaped by your interactions with others and by the social environments, including the culture, in which you operate. Thus, your sense of self plays a key role in how you perceive and react to others.

Some social behaviors, such as helping others, are displayed universally—that is, they take a consistent form in diverse cultures. When a specific social behavior is universal, social psychologists will often use insights from evolutionary psychology to understand how the behavior is adaptive.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, evolutionary psychology is based on the premise that certain psychological processes and behavior patterns evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. Those patterns evolved because in some way they were adaptive, increasing the odds of survival for humans who displayed those qualities. In turn, this survival advantage increased the genetic transmission of those patterns to subsequent generations (see Buss, 2008; Neuberg & others, 2010).

Social psychology research focuses on many different topics. In this chapter, we’ll focus on two key research areas in social psychology. We’ll start with an area that has been greatly influenced by the experimental methods and findings of cognitive psychology, which we discussed in Chapter 7. Social cognition refers to how we form impressions of other people, how we interpret the meaning of other people’s behavior, and how our behavior is affected by our attitudes (Bodenhausen & others, 2003; Frith & Frith, 2012).

Later in the chapter, we’ll look at social influence, which focuses on how our behavior is affected by other people and by situational factors. The study of social influence includes such questions as why we conform to group norms, what compels us to obey an authority figure, under what circumstances we will help a stranger, and what leads us to behave in ways that intentionally harm other people.

Person Perception
FORMING IMPRESSIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE

KEY THEME
Person perception refers to the mental processes we use to form judgments about other people.

KEY QUESTIONS
> What four principles are followed in the person perception process?
> How do social categorization, implicit personality theories, and physical attractiveness affect person perception?

Consider the following scenario. You’re attending college in a big city and you commute from your apartment to campus via the subway. Today the subway is more than half full. If you want to sit down, you’ll have to share a seat with some other passenger. In a matter of seconds, you must decide which stranger you’ll share your ride home with, elbow to elbow, thigh to thigh. How will you decide?
Whether it’s a seat on the subway or in a crowded movie theater, this is a task that most of us confront almost every day: On the basis of very limited information, we must quickly draw conclusions about the nature and likely behavior of people who are complete strangers to us. How do we arrive at these conclusions?

**Person perception** refers to the mental processes we use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics of other people. Person perception is an active, subjective process that always occurs in some **interpersonal context**—that is, situations that involve interactions between two or more people (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010; Smith & Collins, 2009).

In the interpersonal context of a subway car, you evaluate people based on minimal interaction. You form very rapid **first impressions** largely by looking at other people’s faces, regardless of their actual personalities (Ames & others, 2009; Bar & others, 2006; Zebrowsitz & Montepare, 2008). In a mere tenth of a second, you evaluate the other person’s attractiveness, likeability, competence, trustworthiness, and aggressiveness (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

Four key principles guide person perception and influence your decision (see Ambady & Skowronsiki, 2008; Zebrowsitz & Montepare, 2006). Let’s illustrate those principles using the subway scenario.

**Principle 1. Your reactions to others are determined by your perceptions of them, not by who they really are.** On the subway, you quickly choose not to sit next to the big guy with a scowl on his face. Why? Because you perceive him as threatening. Of course, he could be a florist who’s surly because he’s getting home late.

**Principle 2. Your self-perception also influences how you perceive others and how you act on your perceptions.** Your decision about where to sit is also influenced by how you perceive yourself (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010). For example, if you think of yourself as looking intimidating, you may not mind sitting next to the big guy with a scowl.

**Principle 3. Your goals in a particular situation determine the amount and kinds of information you collect about others.** If your goal is to share a subway seat with someone who will basically leave you alone, you will look for characteristics that are relevant to that goal—perhaps someone wearing telltale white earbuds who is obviously listening to music (Goodwin & others, 2002; Hilton, 1998).

**Principle 4. In every situation, you evaluate people partly in terms of how you expect them to act within that particular context.** Whether you’re in a classroom, restaurant, or public restroom, your behavior is governed by **social norms**—the unwritten “rules,” or expectations, for appropriate behavior in that particular social situation (Milgram, 1992). On the subway, for example, you don’t sit next to someone else when empty seats are available, and you don’t read your seatmate’s text messages. Violating these social norms will draw attention from others, as in the cartoon to the right!

What these four guiding principles demonstrate is that person perception is based on an interaction among four components: the perceptions we have of others, our self-perceptions, our goals, and the social norms for that context.

How does person perception play out in the online world of social media? Social psychologists have turned their attention to person perception in online contexts. For example, a Facebook profile photograph is more important than text in driving our perceptions. Even a comment about enjoying hanging out with a big group of friends doesn’t outweigh a photo depicting a loner on a park bench. This person would be perceived as introverted (Van Der Heide & others, 2012).

As another example, a person’s list of Facebook friends, part of the specific context in the Facebook environment, plays a role in how that person will be perceived. People are perceived to be more physically attractive if they have attractive Facebook
Social Categorization

Along with person perception, the subway scenario illustrates our natural tendency to group people into categories. Social categorization is the mental process of classifying people into groups on the basis of common characteristics.

So how do you socially categorize people who are complete strangers, such as the other passengers on the subway? To a certain extent, you consciously focus on easily observable features, such as the other person’s gender, age, or clothing (Kinzler & others, 2010; Miron & Branscomben, 2008). With a quick glance, you might socially categorize someone as “Asian male, 20-something, fraternity sweatshirt, probably a college student.” Social psychologists use the term explicit cognition to refer to these deliberate, conscious mental processes involved in perceptions, judgments, decisions, and reasoning.

However, your social perceptions are not always completely conscious considerations. In many situations, you react to another person with automatic social perceptions, categorizations, and attitudes. Social psychologists use the term implicit cognition to describe the mental processes associated with automatic, nonconscious social evaluations (Gawronski & Payne, 2010).

Prior experiences and beliefs about different social categories can trigger implicit social reactions ranging from very positive to very negative (Nosek & others, 2007). Without consciously realizing it, your reaction to another person can be swayed by characteristics such as ethnicity, weight, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. There also may be evolutionary origins for our automatic reactions to others. For example, facial features perceived as attractive are similar across cultures (Chatterjee, 2011). And people of all ages tend to agree on facial attractiveness. Babies less than a week old also may be evolutionary origins for our automatic reactions to others. For example, unattractive faces (Slater & others, 1998, 2010).

We often assume that certain types of people share certain traits and behaviors. This is referred to as an implicit personality theory. Different models exist to explain how implicit personality theories develop and function (see Critcher & Dunning, 2009; Ybarra, 2002). But in general terms, your previous social and cultural experiences influence the cognitive schemas, or mental frameworks, you hold about the traits and behaviors associated with different “types” of people. So when you perceive someone to be a particular “type,” you assume that the person will display
those traits and behaviors (see Uleman & others, 2008).

Physical appearance cues play an important role in person perception and social categorization (Olivola & Todorov, 2010). Particularly influential is the implicit personality theory that most people have for physically attractive people, particularly with respect to their faces (see Lemay & others, 2010; Todorov & others, 2015). Starting in childhood, we are bombarded with the cultural message that “what is beautiful is good.” In myths, fairy tales, cartoons, movies, and games, heroes are handsome, heroines are beautiful, and the evil villains are ugly (Bazzini & others, 2010). As a result of such cultural conditioning, most people have an implicit personality theory that associates physical attractiveness with a wide range of desirable characteristics.

Decades of research have shown that good-looking people are perceived as being more intelligent, happier, and better adjusted than other people (Eagly & others, 1991; Lorenzo & others, 2010). In an extensive meta-analysis, Judith Langlois and her colleagues (2000) found that people tend to attribute a wide range of positive qualities to attractive individuals, viewing them as being more intelligent, strong, sensitive, honest, sociable, assertive, and emotionally stable. One study even found differences among the same people before and after plastic surgery (Reilly & others, 2015). Participants evaluated photos of women either before or after plastic surgery. The same women were judged to be more attractive, feminine, likable, and socially skilled after plastic surgery than they were before plastic surgery. In addition to attractive people being perceived more positively, Genevieve Lorenzo and her colleagues (2010) found that they are also perceived more accurately, perhaps because people paid more attention to their traits, Lorenzo observed that “people do judge a book by its cover, but a beautiful cover prompts a closer reading” (2010).

But are beautiful people actually happier, smarter, or more successful than the rest of us? Economists Daniel Hamermesh and Jason Abrevya (2011) analyzed data from surveys conducted in four countries and concluded that more attractive people do tend to be happier, primarily because they also tended to have improved economic outcomes, such as higher salaries and more successful spouses.

Some studies have found that attractive people also tend to have higher self-esteem, intelligence, and other desirable personality traits than people of more average appearance (Langlois & others, 2000; Sheppard & others, 2011). Why? One possibility is that, throughout their lives, they receive more favorable treatment from other people, such as parents, teachers, employers, and peers (Langlois & others, 1995; Sheppard & others, 2011). The attention that they receive may also be due to the positive emotional responses they evoke (Lemay & others, 2010). The Focus on Neuroscience on the next page discusses evidence demonstrating that there may be a brain-based reason for the greater social success of beautiful people.

Obviously, the social categorization process has both advantages and disadvantages. Relegating someone to a social category on the basis of superficial information ignores that person’s unique qualities. Sometimes these conclusions are wrong, as Fern’s was when she categorized the scruffy-looking San Francisco man with a cup in his hand as homeless.
On the other hand, relying on social categories is a natural, adaptive, and efficient cognitive process. Social categories provide us with considerable basic information about other people. And from an evolutionary perspective, the ability to make rapid judgments about strangers is probably an evolved characteristic that conferred survival value in our evolutionary past.

Brain Reward When Making Eye Contact with Attractive People

How does physical attractiveness contribute to social success? A study by neuroscientists Knut Kampe and his colleagues (2001) at University College London may offer some insights. In a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study, participants were scanned while they looked at color photographs of 40 different faces, some looking directly at the viewer (eye contact) and some glancing away (non–eye contact). After the fMRI scanning session, participants rated the attractiveness of the faces they had seen.

The results showed that when we make direct eye contact with a physically attractive person, an area on each side of the brain called the ventral striatum is activated (yellow areas in fMRI scan). When the attractive person’s eye gaze is shifted away from the viewer, activity in the ventral striatum decreases. What makes this so interesting is that the ventral striatum is a brain area that predicts reward (Bray & O’Doherty, 2007). Neural activity in the ventral striatum increases when an unexpected reward, such as food or water, suddenly appears. Conversely, activity in the ventral striatum decreases when an expected reward fails to appear.

As Kampe (2001) explains, “What we’ve shown is that when we make eye contact with an attractive person, the brain area that predicts reward starts firing. If we see an attractive person but cannot make eye contact with that person, the activity in this region goes down, signaling disappointment. This is the first study to show that the brain’s ventral striatum processes rewards in the context of human social interaction.”

Other neuroscientists have identified additional brain reward areas, including the orbital frontal cortex, the nucleus accumbens, and the amygdala, that are responsive to facial attractiveness (see Chatterjee, 2011; Cloutier & others, 2008). This suggests that viewing attractive faces tends to activate many of the same brain areas that are involved in processing other types of pleasurable stimuli.

“Facial beauty evokes a widely distributed neural network involving perceptual, decision-making, and reward circuits. [It] may serve as a neural trigger for the pervasive effects of attractiveness in social interactions,” writes neuroscientist Anjan Chatterjee and his colleagues (2009). Apparently, the social advantages associated with facial attractiveness are reinforced by reward processing in the brain.

On the other hand, relying on social categories is a natural, adaptive, and efficient cognitive process. Social categories provide us with considerable basic information about other people. And from an evolutionary perspective, the ability to make rapid judgments about strangers is probably an evolved characteristic that conferred survival value in our evolutionary past.

Attribution

EXPLAINING BEHAVIOR

KEY THEME

Attribution refers to the process of explaining your own behavior and the behavior of other people.

KEY QUESTIONS

Where are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias?

How do attributional biases affect our judgments about the causes of behavior?

How does culture affect attributional processes?

On the first day of class, you sit down and turn to say hi to the classmate next to you. She ignores you and focuses on her phone. You think to yourself, “What a jerk.”
Why did you arrive at that conclusion? After all, it’s completely possible that your classmate is having a very bad day and just doesn’t feel up to talking or is responding to an urgent text message.

**Attribution** is the process of inferring the cause of someone’s behavior, including your own. Psychologists also use the word *attribution* to refer to the explanation you make for a particular behavior. The attributions you make strongly influence your thoughts and feelings about other people.

If your explanation for the silent classmate is that she is just an unpleasant, unfriendly person, you demonstrated a common cognitive bias. The **fundamental attribution error** is the tendency to spontaneously attribute the behavior of others to internal, personal characteristics, while ignoring or underestimating the role of external, situational factors (Ross, 1977). Even though it’s entirely possible that situational forces were behind another person’s behavior, we tend to automatically assume that the cause is an internal, personal characteristic (Bauman & Skitka, 2010; Zimbardo, 2007).

Notice, however, that when it comes to explaining our own behavior, we tend to be biased in the opposite direction, a tendency called the **actor–observer bias**. Rather than internal, personal attributions, we’re more likely to explain our own behavior using external, situational attributions. She ignored you because she’s not nice; you ignored a classmate because you had to text your roommate to check the stove you think you left on. Some jerk pulled out in front of your car because she’s a reckless, inconsiderate moron; you pulled out in front of her car because an overgrown hedge blocked your view (Hennessy & others, 2005). And so on.

Why the discrepancy in accounting for the behavior of others as compared to our own behavior? Part of the explanation is that we simply have more information about the potential causes of our own behavior than we do about the causes of other people’s behavior. When you observe another driver turn directly into the path of your car, that’s typically the only information you have on which to judge his or her behavior. But when you inadvertently pull in front of another car, you perceive your own behavior in the context of the various situational factors, such as road conditions, that influenced your action. You also know what motivated your behavior and how differently you behaved in similar situations in the past. Thus, you’re much more aware of the extent to which your behavior has been influenced by situational factors (Jones, 1990).

The fundamental attribution error plays a role in a common explanatory pattern called **blaming the victim**. The innocent victim of a crime, disaster, or serious illness is blamed for having somehow caused the misfortune or for not having taken steps to prevent it. For example, many people blame the poor for their dire straits, the sick for bringing on their illnesses, and victims of domestic violence or rape for somehow “provoking” their attackers.

The blaming the victim explanatory pattern is reinforced by another common cognitive bias. **Hindsight bias** is the tendency, after an event has occurred, to overestimate one’s ability to have foreseen or predicted the outcome (Roese & Vohs, 2012). In everyday conversations, this is the person who confidently proclaims after the event, “I could have told you that would happen.” In the case of blaming the victim, hindsight bias makes it seem as if the victim should have been able to predict—and prevent—what happened (Goldinger & others, 2003).

Why do people often resort to blaming the victim? People have a strong need to believe that the world is fair—that “we get what we deserve and deserve what we get.” Social psychologist Melvin Lerner (1980) calls this the **just-world hypothesis**.
Explaining Misfortune: The Self-Serving Bias

Given the self-serving bias, are these NASCAR drivers— including Dale Earnhardt, Jr., in car #88—likely to explain their accident by listing internal factors such as their own carelessness or recklessness? Or are they more likely to blame external factors, such as another driver’s poor handling of his vehicle or slick conditions on the Daytona International Speedway?

Blaming the victim reflects the belief that, because the world is just, the victim must have done something to deserve his or her fate (Maes & others, 2012). Collectively, these cognitive biases and explanatory patterns help psychologically insulate us from the uncomfortable thought “It could have just as easily been me” (Alves & Correia, 2008; Ijzerman & Van Prooijen, 2008).

The Self-Serving Bias

Using explanations to meet our needs

If you’ve ever listened to other students react to their grades on an important exam, you’ve seen the self-serving bias in action. When students do well on a test, they tend to congratulate themselves and to attribute their success to how hard they studied, their intelligence, and so forth—all internal attributions. But when a student bombs a test, the external attributions fly left and right: “They were all trick questions!” “I couldn’t concentrate because the guy behind me kept coughing” (Kruger & Gilovich, 2004).

In a wide range of situations, people tend to credit themselves for their success and to blame their failures on external circumstances (Krueger & others, 2008; Mezulis & others, 2004). Psychologists explain the self-serving bias as resulting from an attempt to save face and protect self-esteem in the face of failure (Kurman, 2010; Kwan & others, 2008). Some evolutionary psychologists argue that the self-serving bias leads people to feel and appear more confident than might be justified in a particular situation (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). If others then perceive us as more confident, we may have more access to resources that allow us to survive and pass on our genes.

Explaining Failure and Murder: Culture and Attributional Biases

Although the self-serving bias is common in individualistic cultures such as Australia and the United States, it is far from universal. In many collectivistic cultures, an opposite attributional bias is often demonstrated (Mezulis & others, 2004; Uskul & Kitayama, 2011). Called the self-effacing bias or modesty bias, it involves blaming failure on internal, personal factors, while attributing success to external, situational factors.

For example, compared to American students, Japanese and Chinese students are more likely to attribute academic failure to personal factors, such as lack of effort, instead of situational factors (Dornbusch & others, 1996). Thus, a Japanese student who does poorly on an exam is likely to say, “I didn’t study hard enough.” In contrast, Japanese and Chinese students tend to attribute academic success to situational factors. For example, they might say, “The exam was very easy” or “There was very little competition this year” (Stevenson & others, 1986).

One study asked participants to rate people who were answering questions about their achievements (Chen & Jing, 2012). Collectivistic participants tended to prefer the people who gave modest answers, whereas individualistic participants tended to like people who boasted in their answers.

Cross-cultural differences are also evident with the fundamental attribution error. In general, members of collectivistic cultures are less likely to commit the fundamental attribution error than are members of individualistic cultures (M. Bond & Smith, 1996; Koennig & Dean, 2011). That is, collectivists are more likely to attribute the causes of another person’s behavior to external, situational factors rather than to internal, personal factors—the exact opposite of the attributional bias that is demonstrated in individualistic cultures (Uskul & Kitayama, 2011).

To test this idea in a naturally occurring context, psychologists Michael Morris and Kaiping Peng (1994) compared articles reporting the same mass murders in Chinese-language and English-language newspapers. In one case, the murderer was a Chinese graduate student attending a U.S. university. In the other case, the murderer was a U.S. postal worker. Regardless of whether the murderer was American or Chinese, the news accounts were fundamentally different depending on whether the reporter was American or Chinese.

The American reporters were more likely to explain the killings by making personal, internal attributions. For example, American reporters emphasized the postal worker’s “history of being mentally unstable.” In contrast, the Chinese reporters emphasized situational factors, such as the fact that the postal worker had recently been fired from his job.

Clearly, then, how we account for our successes and failures, as well as how we account for the actions of others, is yet another example of how human behavior is influenced by cultural conditioning.

Haughtiness invites ruin; humility receives benefits.

—Chinese Proverb
Although common in many societies, the self-serving bias is far from universal, as cross-cultural psychologists have discovered (see the Culture and Human Behavior box). The various attributional biases are summarized in Table 11.1.

**KEY THEME**

An attitude is a learned tendency to evaluate objects, people, or issues in a particular way.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

› What are the three components of an attitude?
› Under what conditions are attitudes most likely to determine behavior?
› What is cognitive dissonance?

Should high school graduation requirements include a class on basic sex education, birth control methods, and safe sex? Should there be a compulsory military or community service requirement for all young adults? Should the government be doing more to prepare for climate change?

On these and many other subjects, you’ve probably formed an attitude. Psychologists formally define an **attitude** as a learned tendency to evaluate some object, person, or issue in a particular way (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010; Bohnet & Dickel, 2011). Attitudes are typically positive or negative, but they can also be **ambivalent**, as when you have mixed feelings about an issue, person, or group (Costarelli, 2011).

As shown in Figure 11.1 on the next page, attitudes can include three components. First, an attitude may have a **cognitive component**: your thoughts about a given topic or object. For example, Emil is an art lover. He often tells his friends that, in his opinion, visiting galleries and museums encourages people to be more open to new experiences. Second, an attitude may have an emotional or **affective component**, as when Emil talks excitedly about how energized he is after seeing an exhibition of Jeff Koons’ art. Finally, an attitude may have a **behavioral component**, in which attitudes are

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**Table 11.1**

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

**self-serving bias** The tendency to attribute successful outcomes of one’s own behavior to internal causes and unsuccessful outcomes to external, situational causes.

**attitude** A learned tendency to evaluate some object, person, or issue in a particular way; such evaluations may be positive, negative, or ambivalent.
reflected in action, as when Emil donates to an organization that introduces schoolchildren to the arts.

Along with forming attitudes toward objects, ideas, or political campaigns, we also form attitudes about people. The In Focus box “Interpersonal Attraction and Liking” discusses some of the factors that affect the thoughts and feelings that we develop about other people.

The Effect of Attitudes on Behavior

Intuitively, you probably assume that your attitudes tend to guide your behavior. But social psychologists have consistently found that people don’t always act in accordance with their attitudes. For example, you might disapprove of cheating yet find yourself peeking at a classmate’s exam paper when the opportunity presents itself.

When are your attitudes likely to influence or determine your behavior? Social psychologists have found that you’re most likely to behave in accordance with your attitudes when:

• You anticipate a favorable outcome or response from others for behaving that way.
• Your attitudes are extreme or are frequently expressed (Ajzen, 2001).
• You are very knowledgeable about the subject (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2010).
• You have a vested interest in the subject and personally stand to gain or lose something on a specific issue (Thornton & Tizard, 2010).

Clearly, your attitudes do influence your behavior in many instances. Now, consider the opposite question: Can your behavior influence your attitudes?

The Effect of Behavior on Attitudes

Suppose you have volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment. At the lab, a friendly experimenter asks you to indicate your degree of preference for a variety of foods, including fried grasshoppers, which you rank pretty low on the list. During the experiment, the experimenter instructs you to eat some fried grasshoppers. You manage to swallow three of the crispy critters. At the end of the experiment, your attitudes toward grasshoppers as a food source are surveyed again.
Interpersonal Attraction and Liking

In psychology, attraction refers to feeling drawn to other people—having positive thoughts and feelings about them. Often, attraction motivates us to interact with or develop a relationship with the attractive person.

What makes one person more attractive than another? Personal characteristics such as warmth and trustworthiness, adventurousness, and social status influence judgments of attractiveness (Finkel & Baumeister, 2010; Sprecher & Helmle, 2008). But physical appearance, especially facial features, is probably the most significant factor in attraction. Studies reveal that wide smiles, high eyebrows, dilated pupils, and full lips are judged as attractive by both men and women, and that these preferences are consistent across many cultures (Chatterjee, 2011; Perrett, 2010). Some evolutionary psychologists argue that we associate attractive facial features with health, a desirable characteristic in a mating partner (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002). However, the sexes do differ in some respects. For example, in online dating, women tend to prefer men who are taller than average, but men tend to prefer women who are of short or average height (Hitsch & others, 2010).

Ideals of Beauty Around the World

Large eyes, a wide smile, and full lips are attractive in cultures around the world. The beautiful smiles of a Hmong woman from Thailand, a young Hispanic American man, a woman from Chile, and a man from the Omo Delta in East Africa would be considered attractive by any cultural standard.

Some aspects of attraction are interpersonal. For example, we are more attracted to people whom we perceive as being like us—in physical characteristics, personality traits, attitudes, and even psychological health (Finkel & Baumeister, 2010). Although similarity is a powerful predictor of attraction in most Western cultures, cross-cultural research has shown that it is less important in some Eastern cultures, such as Japan (Heine & others, 2009).

Familiarity is another predictor of attraction and liking. In general, the more we interact with a person, the more we tend to like that person. Why? One explanation is that most interactions with other people are relatively pleasant (Reis & others, 2011). So, unless a person is particularly obnoxious or unpleasant, frequent interactions lead to more feelings of mutual pleasure, understanding, and acceptance.

The situations in which we interact with people also affect attraction. When happy, intoxicated, or physically aroused by exercise or exertion, we are more likely to rate others as attractive (Finkel & Baumeister, 2010). And, if we anticipate that attractive people are likely to be attracted to or like us, we’re more likely to be attracted to them, to like them, and to behave warmly toward them (Sinison & others, 2009).

Finally, feelings of attraction can be influenced by the socio-economic and cultural environment. For example, cross-cultural research has shown that men in societies in which food and resources are in short supply tend to prefer heavier women (Swami & Tovée, 2006; Tovée & others, 2006). Conversely, a preference for thinner women is more common in societies where resources are abundant (Swami & others, 2010).

But is it culture or hunger that shapes a preference for heavier women? In a clever study, Leif Nelson and Evan Morrison (2005) compared the preferences of college students as they were entering and leaving a campus dining hall at dinnertime. The presumably hungry men entering the dining hall preferred heavier women than the satiated men exiting the dining hall. (Having an empty or full stomach didn’t affect the female college students’ ratings of an ideal body shape.) The moral of the story: Culture affects body shape preference, but may do so through processes that are not culture-specific but rather situational.

Researchers have also observed a preference for specific body proportions that is consistent across cultures (Singh & others, 2010). Whether heavy or thin, a woman with a waist that is a good deal smaller than her hips seems to be universally viewed as attractive. This is true even among men who are blind; without ever having seen images of women considered beautiful, they preferred this proportion when they felt female mannequins (Karremans & others, 2010). Why? This body proportion has been shown to predict both lower risk for a range of diseases, including diabetes and cancer, and increased reproductive success (Singh & Singh, 2011). Evolutionary researchers suggest that this preference makes perfect sense, as a healthy reproductive partner increases the chance of genes being passed on. (The research on mate preferences is discussed further on page 378 in Chapter 9.)
Later in the day, you talk to a friend who also participated in the experiment. You mention how friendly and polite you thought the experimenter was. But your friend had a different experience. He thought the experimenter was an arrogant, rude jerk.

Here’s the critical question: Whose attitude toward eating fried grasshoppers is more likely to change in a positive direction? Given that you interacted with a friendly experimenter, most people assume that your feelings about fried grasshoppers are more likely to have improved than your friend’s attitude. In fact, it is your friend—who encountered the obnoxious experimenter—who is much more likely to hold a more positive attitude toward eating fried grasshoppers than you.

At first glance, this finding seems to go against the grain of common sense. So how can we explain this outcome? The fried grasshoppers story represents the basic design of a classic experiment by social psychologist Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues (1965). Zimbardo’s experiment underscored the importance of cognitive dissonance, a phenomenon first identified by social psychologists Leon Festinger and J. Merrill Carlsmith (1959). Cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of psychological tension (dissonance) that occurs when there’s an inconsistency between two thoughts or perceptions (cognitions). This state of dissonance is so unpleasant that we are strongly motivated to reduce it (Festinger, 1957, 1962; Gawronski, 2012).

Cognitive dissonance commonly occurs in situations in which you become uncomfortably aware that your behavior and your attitudes are in conflict (Cooper, 2012). In these situations, you are simultaneously holding two conflicting cognitions: your original attitude versus the realization that your behavior contradicts that attitude. If you can easily rationalize your behavior to make it consistent with your attitude, then any dissonance you might experience can be quickly and easily resolved. But when your behavior cannot be easily justified, how can you resolve the contradiction and eliminate the unpleasant state of dissonance? Since you can’t go back and change the behavior, you change your attitude to make it consistent with your behavior.

Let’s take another look at the results of the grasshopper study, this time from the perspective of cognitive dissonance theory. Your attitude toward eating grasshoppers did not change. Why? Because you could easily rationalize the conflict between your attitude (“Eating grasshoppers is disgusting”) and your behavior (eating three grasshoppers). You probably justified your behavior by saying something like, “I ate the grasshoppers because I wanted to help out the nice experimenter.” However, your friend, who encountered the rude experimenter, can’t use that rationalization. Thus, he experiences an uncomfortable state of cognitive dissonance. Since he can’t go back and change his behavior, he is left with the only part of the equation that can be changed—his attitude (see Figure 11.2). “You know, eating those grasshoppers wasn’t that bad,” your friend comments. “In fact, they were kind of crunchy.” Notice how his change in attitude reduces the dissonance between his previous attitude and his behavior. And he might not have even realized that his attitude had changed.

Research from social neuroscience suggests that cognitive dissonance can lead to attitude change quickly, perhaps without us even realizing that the process is occurring. Difficult decisions are often followed by an attitude change that favors the object or outcome chosen. Brain scans show changes in the parts of the brain associated with distress, arousal, emotion, and conflict within seconds after a person makes a difficult decision, which may indicate the discomfort produced by the change in attitude (Jarcho & others, 2010; van Veen & others, 2009).

This response to cognitive dissonance does not seem to be unique to adults or even humans. Louisa Egan and her colleagues (2007) have seen dissonance among four-year-old children who are forced to choose between two stickers—a dolphin sticker and a dragonfly sticker, for example—that they previously liked equally. They also observed the same effect among capuchin monkeys who were forced to choose between two colors of M&Ms that they previously liked equally. After choosing one, the monkeys preferred the chosen M&M color from then on. In both cases, it was not just that they were familiar with the chosen sticker or chosen M&M. Even when the researchers made the choice, the children and chimps preferred the chosen stickers and M&M color over the other options.
Attitude change due to cognitive dissonance is quite common in everyday life. For example, consider the person who impulsively buys a new leather coat that she really can’t afford. “It was too good a bargain to pass up,” she rationalizes. Similarly, researchers have found that people who quit smoking offered fewer rationalizations for smoking. But if they started smoking again, they started rationalizing again. For example, some said, “You’ve got to die of something, so why not enjoy yourself and smoke” (Fotuhi & others, 2013).

Cognitive dissonance also influences how we frame decisions we have made when we have chosen between two alternatives, such as which college to attend. After you make a choice, you emphasize the negative features of the choice you’ve rejected, which is commonly called a “sour grapes” rationalization. You also emphasize the positive features of the choice to which you have committed yourself—a “sweet lemons” rationalization.

**KEY THEME**

Prejudice refers to a negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group, while stereotypes are clusters of characteristics that are attributed to people who belong to specific social categories.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

› What is the function of stereotypes, and how do they relate to prejudice?
› What are in-groups and out-groups, and how do they influence social judgments?
› What are implicit attitudes, and how are they measured?

In this section, you’ll see how person perception, attribution, and attitudes come together in explaining prejudice—a negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group.

Prejudice is ultimately based on the exaggerated notion that members of other social groups are very different from members of our own social group. So as you read this discussion, it’s important for you to keep two well-established points in mind. First, people from different groups, such as from different racial and ethnic groups, are far more alike than they are different (Mallett & Wilson, 2010; Wagner & others, 2011). And second, any differences that may exist between members of different groups are far smaller than differences among various members of the same group (Bodenhausen & Richeson, 2010).

It also is important to observe that conversations about prejudice often focus on race and ethnicity. But prejudice can occur with respect to many different kinds of social groups. There can be prejudice based on sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or age. There can also be prejudice based on a person’s identification with...
multiple groups (Herek & McLemore, 2013; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Newheiser & others, 2013; North & Fiske, 2013). For example, one study found that older people were perceived more negatively than middle-aged or younger people when they acted in unexpected ways, such as listening to Rihanna and other pop singers. Although younger people and middle-aged people could act in ways that were unexpected for their age, older people could not do so without consequences (North & Fiske, 2013). Older people did not have the same freedom to have the same range of interests that younger people had.

**From Stereotypes to Prejudice**

**IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS**

As we noted earlier, using social categories to organize information about other people seems to be a natural cognitive tendency. Many social categories can be defined by relatively objective characteristics, such as age, language, religion, and skin color. A specific kind of social category is a **stereotype**—a cluster of characteristics that are attributed to members of a specific social group or category. Stereotypes are based on the assumption that people have certain characteristics because of their membership in a particular group.

Stereotypes typically include qualities that are unrelated to the objective criteria that define a given category (Crawford & others, 2011). For example, we can objectively sort people into different categories by age. But our stereotypes for different age groups may include qualities that have little or nothing to do with “number of years since birth.” Associations of “impulsive and irresponsible” with teenagers, or “boring and conservative” with middle-aged adults are examples of associating unrelated qualities with age groups—that is, stereotyping.

Like our use of other social categories, our tendency to stereotype social groups seems to be a natural cognitive process. Stereotypes simplify social information so that we can sort out, process, and remember information about other people more easily (Bodenhausen & Richeson, 2010). But like other mental shortcuts we’ve discussed in this chapter, relying on stereotypes can cause problems. Attributing a stereotypic cause for an outcome or event can blind us to the true causes of events (Johnston & Miles, 2007). For example, a parent who assumes that a girl’s poor computer skills are due to her gender rather than a lack of instruction might never encourage her to overcome her problem.

Research by psychologist Claude Steele (1997, 2003, 2011) has demonstrated another detrimental effect of negative stereotypes, which he calls **stereotype threat**. As we discussed in Chapter 7, simply being aware that your social group is associated with a particular stereotype can negatively impact your performance on tests or tasks that measure...
abilities that are thought to be associated with that stereotype (Schmader, 2010; Shapiro & others, 2013). For example, even mathematically gifted women tend to score lower on difficult math tests when told that the test tended to produce gender differences than when told that such tests did not produce gender differences (Forbes & Schmader, 2010; Rydell & others, 2010). (On pages 304–305 in Chapter 7, you’ll find some suggestions for counteracting the effects of stereotype threat.)

Once they are formed, stereotypes are hard to shake. Sometimes stereotypes have a kernel of truth, making them easy to confirm, especially when you see only what you expect to see. Even so, there’s a vast difference between a kernel and the cornfield. When stereotypic beliefs become expectations that are applied to all members of a given group, stereotypes can be both misleading and damaging (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010).

Consider the stereotype that men are more assertive than women and that women are more nurturing than men. This stereotype does have evidence to support it, but only in terms of the average difference between men and women (Wood & Eagly, 2010). Thus, it would be unfair and often inaccurate to automatically apply this stereotype to every individual man and woman.

Equally important, when confronted by evidence that contradicts a stereotype, people tend to discount that information in a variety of ways (Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). For example, suppose you are firmly convinced that all “Zeegs” are dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy. One day you absent-mindedly leave your wallet on a store’s checkout counter. As you walk into the parking lot, you hear a voice calling, “Hey, you forgot your wallet!” It’s a Zeeg running after you to return your wallet.

Will this experience change your stereotype of Zeegs as dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy? Probably not. It’s more likely that you’ll conclude that this individual Zeeg is an exception to the stereotype. If you run into more than one honest Zeeg, you may create a mental subgroup for individuals who belong to the larger group but depart from the stereotype in some way (Queller & Mason, 2008; Sherman & others, 2005). By creating a subcategory of “honest, hardworking Zeegs,” you can still maintain your more general stereotype of Zeegs as dishonest, sly, and untrustworthy.

Creating exceptions allows people to maintain stereotypes in the face of contradictory evidence. Typical of this exception—that-proves-the-rule approach is the person who says, “Hey, I’m not prejudiced! In fact, I’ve got a couple of good friends who are Zeegs.”

Stereotypes are closely related to another tendency in person perception. People have a strong tendency to perceive others in terms of two very basic social categories: “us” and “them.” More precisely, the in-group (“us”) refers to the group or groups to which we belong, and the out-group (“them”) refers to groups of which we are not a member. Preferences for the in-group start early (Rhodes & Chalik, 2013). One study conducted in the U.S. and in Taiwan found that as soon as the children in the racial majority were able to categorize people according to race, preferences for their own race emerged (Dunham & others, 2013). Among children in-group A social group to which one belongs.

out-group A social group to which one does not belong.
as young as three and four years old, white Americans preferred white faces over black or Asian faces, and Asians in Taiwan preferred Asian faces over white faces.

In-groups and out-groups aren’t necessarily limited to racial, ethnic, or religious boundaries. Virtually any characteristic can be used to make in-group and out-group distinctions: Mac versus PC users, Cubs versus White Sox fans, and even, it seems, graham cracker lovers versus green bean lovers. Both 9-month-old and 14-month-old infants liked a rabbit puppet better when it shared their preference for either graham crackers or green beans (Hamlin & others, 2013).

THE OUT-GROUP HOMOGENEITY EFFECT
THEY’RE ALL THE SAME TO ME

Two important patterns characterize our views of in-groups versus out-groups. First, when we describe the members of our in-group, we typically see them as being quite varied, despite having enough features in common to belong to the same group. In other words, we notice the diversity within our own group.

Second, we tend to see members of the out-group as much more similar to one another, even in areas that have little to do with the criteria for group membership. This tendency is called the out-group homogeneity effect. (The word homogeneity means “similarity” or “uniformity.”)

For example, what qualities do you associate with the category of “engineering major”? If you’re not an engineering major, you’re likely to see engineering majors as a rather similar crew: male, logical, analytical, conservative, and so forth. However, if you are an engineering major, you’re much more likely to see your in-group as quite heterogeneous, or varied (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). You might even come up with several subgroups, such as studious engineering majors versus party-animal engineering majors, and electrical engineering majors versus chemical engineering majors.

IN-GROUP BIAS
WE’RE TACTFUL—THEY’RE SNEAKY

In-group bias is our tendency to make favorable, positive attributions for behaviors by members of our in-group and unfavorable, negative attributions for behaviors by members of out-groups. We succeeded because we worked hard; they succeeded because they lucked out. We failed because of circumstances beyond our control; they failed because they’re stupid and incompetent. We’re thrifty; they’re stingy. And so on.

In combination, stereotypes and in-group/out-group bias form the cognitive basis for prejudicial attitudes. But, as with many attitudes, prejudice also has a strong emotional component (Jackson, 2011). In the case of prejudice, the emotions are intensely negative—and evident in brain scans. In one study, participants viewing images of low-status people—such as homeless people or drug addicts—showed increased activity in the amygdala and insula, an indication of disgust (Harris & Fiske, 2006). The same researchers examined participants’ responses to images of people often stereotyped as incompetent, such as people who are elderly or disabled. Participants viewing these images showed increased activity in the prefrontal cortex, activity that accompanies pity (see photo at left). Behaviorally, prejudice can be displayed in some form of discrimination—behaviors ranging from sneering at to physically attacking members of an out-group (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010).

How can we account for the extreme emotions that often characterize prejudice...
against out-group members? One theory holds that prejudice and intergroup hostility increase when different groups are competing for scarce resources, whether jobs, acreage, oil, water, or political power (see Pratto & Glasford, 2008). Prejudice and intergroup hostility are also likely to increase during times of social change (Brewer, 1994; Staub, 1996). However, policies that promote diversity can decrease prejudice, even when groups are in conflict (Guimond & others, 2013).

But prejudice often exists in the absence of direct competition for resources, changing social conditions, or even contact with members of a particular out-group. What accounts for prejudice in such situations? One explanation is that people are often prejudiced against groups that are perceived as threatening important in-group norms and values (Esses & others, 2005; Louis & others, 2013). For example, a person might be extremely prejudiced against gays and lesbians because he feels that they threaten his in-group’s cherished values, such as a strong commitment to traditional sex roles and family structure. This explanation is supported by several neuroscience studies that observed increased activity in the amygdala when participants viewed someone of a different race (Cikara & Van Bavel, 2014). The amygdala is associated with responses related to fear.

**IMPLICIT ATTITUDES**

Most people today agree that prejudice and racism are wrong. Blatant displays of racist, sexist, or homophobic speech or behavior are no longer socially acceptable. However, some psychologists now believe that overt forms of prejudice have been replaced by more subtle forms of prejudice (Hewstone & others, 2002; Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010).

Sometimes people who are not consciously prejudiced against particular groups nevertheless respond in prejudiced ways (Plant & Devine, 2009). For example, a man who consciously strives to be nonsexist may be reluctant to consult a female surgeon, or when he hears a news story that mentions a police officer, he may assume the officer is a man. Such biased responses can sometimes affect behavior in ways that we neither intend nor realize (Devine, 2001; Stanley & others, 2011). And many of these effects can be harmful. For black Americans, for example, implicit attitudes about race have been linked to difficulties getting hired or receiving lifesaving medical treatment, to higher rates of discipline in school, and to an increased likelihood of being the victim of police violence (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Richardson, 2015).

How can such responses be explained? In contrast to *explicit* attitudes, of which you are consciously aware, *implicit attitudes* are evaluations that are automatic, spontaneous, unintentional, and difficult to control (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). They are sometimes, but not always, unconscious (Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010).

Our implicit attitudes often differ from our explicit attitudes, especially when social and cultural norms prohibit negative attitudes regarding race, gender, or sexual orientation (Bodenhausen & Richeson, 2010). If people won’t admit or aren’t consciously aware of implicit attitudes, how can they be detected and measured? The most widely used test to measure implicit attitudes and preferences is the *Implicit Association Test*, or IAT, developed by psychologist Anthony Greenwald and his colleagues (1998).

The IAT is a computer-based test that measures the degree to which you associate particular groups of people with specific characteristics or attributes. The IAT is based on the assumption that people can sort images and words more easily when concepts seem to “match” or go together. So, for example, the Age IAT measures the speed with which you classify pairings of “good” or “bad” words with photographs of people of different ages. Similarly, the Race–Weapons IAT measures the degree to which participants associate photographs of black or white faces with weapons (like a gun or a sword) or harmless objects (a camera or water bottle).

Other IATs measure implicit attitudes toward sexual orientation, weight, disability, and racial and ethnic groups. IATs have also been developed to measure the strength of stereotyped associations, such as the strength of associations between gender and career or family. You can try the IAT yourself online at: https://implicit.harvard.edu.
The IAT has been completed by over 10 million people around the world (Banaji 
& Heiphetz, 2010). The results suggest that implicit preferences are quite pervasive. As Brian 
Nosek and his colleagues (2007) concluded, “With few exceptions, across domains and 
demographic categories, participants showed implicit and explicit social preferences and 
stereotypes. Men and women, young and old, conservative and liberal, Black, White, 
Asian, and Hispanic—all groups have social preferences for some groups over others, and 
hold stereotypic associations or beliefs. Social preferences are not possessed exclusively by 
a privileged few—they are a general characteristic of human social cognition.”

Although in wide use, the IAT is controversial (see Amodio & Mendoza, 2010; 
Azar, 2008). For example, some researchers argue that the ease with which certain 
associations are made may reflect familiarity with cultural stereotypes, rather than 
personal bias or prejudice (Blanton & others, 2009). Other researchers have demon-
strated that brief training can reduce prejudice as measured by the IAT (Calanchini 
& others, 2013). And, the degree to which implicit attitudes affect actual behavior is 
still an open question, although some studies suggest that they do (see Greenwald & 
others, 2009; Stanley & others, 2011).

Despite controversies about the IAT, there is evidence that implicit attitudes can 
be changed. For example, psychologists agree that becoming aware of our biased 
attitudes, whether implicit or explicit, is an important step toward overcoming them 
(Devine & others, 2012; Paluck & Green, 2009). Also, mindfulness meditation, 
introduced in the chapter on consciousness, has been shown to reduce implicit bias 
based on both age and race (Lueke & Gibson, 2015). We turn to the topic of over-
coming prejudice in the next section.

Overcoming Prejudice

**KEY THEME**
Prejudice can be overcome when people cooperate to achieve a common goal.

**KEY QUESTIONS**
- How has this finding been applied in the educational system?
- What other conditions are essential to reducing tension between groups?

How can prejudice be combated? A classic series of studies headed by psychologist 
Muzafer Sherif helped clarify the conditions that produce intergroup conflict and 
harmony. Sherif and his colleagues (1961) studied a group of 11-year-old boys in an 
unlikely setting for a scientific experiment: a summer camp located at Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma.

**THE ROBBERS CAVE EXPERIMENT**

Pretending to be camp counselors and staff, the researchers observed the boys’ behavior under carefully orchestrated conditions. The boys were randomly assigned to two groups. The groups arrived at camp in separate buses and were headquartered in different areas of the camp. One group of boys dubbed themselves the Eagles, the other the Rattlers. After a week of separation, the researchers arranged for the groups to meet in a series of competitive games. A fierce rivalry quickly developed, demonstrating the ease with which mutually hostile groups could be created.

The rivalry became increasingly bitter. The Eagles burned the Rattlers’ flag. In response, the Rattlers trashed the Eagles’ cabin. Somewhat alarmed, the researchers tried to diminish the hostility by bringing the two groups together under peaceful 
conditions and on an equal basis—having them go to the movies together, 
and so forth. But contact alone did not mitigate the hostility. For example, when the Rattlers and Eagles ate together in the same dining hall, a massive food fight erupted!

How could harmony between the groups be established? Sherif and his fellow researchers created a series of situations in which the two groups would need to cooperate
To achieve a common goal. For example, the researchers secretly sabotaged the water supply. Working together, the Eagles and the Rattlers managed to fix it. After a series of such joint efforts, the rivalry diminished and the groups became good friends (Sherif, 1956; Sherif & others, 1961).

Sherif successfully demonstrated how hostility between groups could be created and, more important, how that hostility could be overcome. However, other researchers questioned whether these results would apply to other intergroup situations. After all, these boys were very homogeneous: white, middle class, Protestant, and carefully selected for being healthy and well-adjusted (Fiske & Ruscher, 1993; Sherif, 1966). In other words, there were no intrinsic differences between the Rattlers and the Eagles; there was only the artificial distinction created by the researchers.

THE JIGSAW CLASSROOM
PROMOTING COOPERATION

Social psychologist Elliot Aronson (1990, 1992) tried adapting the results of the Robbers Cave experiments to a very different group situation—a newly integrated elementary school. Realizing that mere contact between black and white children was not dissipating tension and prejudice, Aronson reasoned that perhaps the competitive schoolroom atmosphere was partly at fault.

Aronson and his colleagues tried a teaching technique that stressed cooperative, rather than competitive, learning situations (see Aronson, 1990; Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979). Dubbed the jigsaw classroom technique, this approach brought together students in small, ethnically diverse groups to work on a mutual project. Like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each student became an expert on one aspect of the overall project and had to teach it to the other members of the group. Thus, interdependence and cooperation replaced competition.

The results? Children in the jigsaw classrooms had higher self-esteem and a greater liking for children in other ethnic groups than did children in traditional classrooms. They also demonstrated a lessening of negative stereotypes and prejudice, and a reduction in intergroup hostility (see Aronson, 1987, 1995; Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979). As Aronson (1999) points out, “Cooperation changes our tendency to categorize the out-group from ‘those people’ to ‘us people’.”

Lessons from Robbers Cave and the jigsaw classroom have been used to reduce prejudice and conflict among ethnic and religious groups around the world (Aboud & others, 2012). For example, a number of programs have been developed to promote cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians through joint projects in which members of both groups work together to stage a play, conduct scientific studies, or play on a soccer team (Maoz, 2012).

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Life in society requires consensus as an indispensable condition. But consensus, to be productive, requires that each individual contribute independently out of his experience and insight. When consensus comes under the dominance of conformity, the social process is polluted and the individual at the same time surrenders the powers on which his functioning as a feeling being depends.

—Solomon Asch (1955)

typically contribute to class discussions, you’ve probably felt the power of social influence in classes where nobody else said a word (Stowell & others, 2010). No doubt you found yourself feeling at least slightly uncomfortable every time you ventured a comment.

If you changed your behavior to mesh with that of your classmates, you demonstrated conformity. Conformity occurs when you adjust your opinions, judgment, or behavior so that it matches that of other people, or the norms of a social group or situation (Hogg, 2010).

There’s no question that all of us conform to group or situational norms to some degree. The more critical issue is how far we’ll go to adjust our perceptions and opinions so that they’re in sync with the majority opinion—an issue that intrigued social psychologist Solomon Asch. Asch (1951) posed a straightforward question: Would people still conform to the group if the group opinion was clearly wrong?

To study this question experimentally, Asch (1955) chose a simple, objective task with an obvious answer (Figure 11.3). A group of people sat at a table and looked at a series of cards. On one side of each card was a standard line. On the other side were three comparison lines. All each person had to do was publicly indicate which comparison line was the same length as the standard line.

Asch’s experiment had a hidden catch. All the people sitting around the table were actually in cahoots with the experimenter, except for one—the real participant. Had you been the real participant in Asch’s (1956) experiment, here’s what you would have experienced. The first card is shown, and the five people ahead of you respond, one at a time, with the obvious answer: “Line B.” Now it’s your turn, and you respond the same. The second card is put up. Again, the answer is obvious and the group is unanimous. So far, so good.

Then the third card is shown, and the correct answer is just as obvious: Line C. But the first person confidently says, “Line A.” And so does everyone else, one by one. Now it’s your turn. To you it’s clear that the correct answer is Line C. But the five people ahead of you have already publicly chosen Line A. How do you respond? You hesitate. Do you go with the flow or with what you know?

The real participant was faced with the uncomfortable situation of disagreeing with a unanimous majority on 12 of 18 trials in Asch’s experiment. Notice, there was no direct pressure to conform—just the implicit, unspoken pressure of answering differently from the rest of the group. Over 100 participants experienced Asch’s experimental dilemma. Not surprisingly, participants differed in their degree of conformity. Nonetheless, the majority of Asch’s participants (76 percent) conformed with the group judgment on at least one of the critical trials. When the data for all participants were combined, the participants followed the majority and gave the wrong answer on 37 percent of the critical trials (Asch, 1955, 1957). In comparison, a control group of participants who responded alone instead of in a group accurately chose the matching line 99 percent of the time.

Although the majority opinion clearly exerted a strong influence, it’s also important to stress the flip side of Asch’s results. On almost two-thirds of the trials in which the majority named the wrong line, the participants stuck to their guns and gave the correct answer, despite being in the minority (see Friend & others, 1990; Hodges & Geyer, 2006). And 95 percent defied the majority and gave the correct response at least once. In fact, some researchers argue that these results show more independence than conformity (Griggs, 2015).

Even those who conform may not have experienced a lasting change in their perception or opinion. One study observed conformity with respect to people’s opinions about others’ attractiveness (Huang & others, 2014). In follow-up studies, however, any change in opinion due to conformity was present after three days, but not after seven days.
Factors Influencing Conformity

The basic model of Asch’s classic experiment has been used in hundreds of studies exploring the dynamics of conformity (Bond, 2005). It’s even been examined in online contexts, where people are making decisions based on the responses of anonymous, unseen others (Rosander & Eriksson, 2012; Zhu & others, 2012). Why do we sometimes find ourselves conforming to the larger group? There are two basic reasons.

First is our desire to be liked and accepted by the group, which is referred to as normative social influence. Interestingly, the power of social influence may apply uniquely to humans. One study found that two-year-old humans, but not chimpanzees or orangutans, conformed to the behavior of their peers (Haun & others, 2014). Second is our desire to be right. When we're uncertain or doubt our own judgment, we may look to the group as a source of accurate information, which is called informational social influence (Turner, 2010).

Asch and other researchers identified several conditions that promote conformity, which are summarized in Table 11.2. But Asch also discovered that conformity decreased under certain circumstances. For example, having an ally seemed to counteract the social influence of the majority. Participants were more likely to go against the majority view if just one other participant did so, even if the other person’s dissenting opinion is wrong (Allen & Levine, 1969; Packer, 2008b). Conformity also lessens even if the other dissenter’s competence is questionable, as in the case of a dissenter who wore thick glasses and complained that he could not see the lines very well (Allen & Levine, 1971; Turner, 2010).

### Table 11.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors That Promote Conformity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’re more likely to conform to group norms when:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are facing a unanimous group of at least four or five people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You must give your response in front of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You have not already expressed commitment to a different idea or opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You find the task to be ambiguous or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You doubt your abilities or knowledge in the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are strongly attracted to a group and want to be a member of it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**: Asch (1955), Campbell & Fairey (1989); Deutsch & Gerard (1955); Gerard & others (1968); Tanford & Penrod (1984).

Culture and Conformity

Do patterns of conformity differ in other cultures? The answer seems to be yes. A survey of more than 80,000 people from 62 countries found that the value placed on conformity varied widely across cultures (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011). How might conformity vary across cultures? British psychologists Rod Bond and Peter Smith (1996) found in a wide-ranging meta-analysis that conformity is generally higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. Because individualistic cultures tend to emphasize independence, self-expression, and standing out from the crowd, the whole notion of conformity tends to carry a negative connotation.

In collectivistic cultures, however, publicly conforming while privately disagreeing tends to be regarded as socially appropriate tact or sensitivity. Publicly challenging the judgments of others, particularly the judgment of members of one’s in-group, would be considered rude, tactless, and insensitive to the feelings of others.

**Conformity** Adjusting your opinions, judgments, or behaviors so that they match the opinions, judgments, or behaviors of other people, or the norms of a social group or situation.

**Normative social influence** Behavior that is motivated by the desire to gain social acceptance and approval.

**Informational social influence** Behavior that is motivated by the desire to be correct.
CHAPTER 11  Social Psychology

Obedience

JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS

KEY THEME
Stanley Milgram conducted a series of controversial studies on obedience, which is behavior performed in direct response to the orders of an authority.

KEY QUESTIONS
▷ What were the results of Milgram’s original obedience experiments?
▷ What experimental factors were shown to increase the level of obedience?
▷ What experimental factors were shown to decrease the level of obedience?

Stanley Milgram was one of the most creative and influential researchers that social psychology has known (Blass, 2004, 2009; A. G. Miller, 2009). He is best known for his experimental investigations of obedience. Obedience is the performance of a behavior in response to a direct command. Typically, an authority figure or a person of higher status, such as a teacher or supervisor, gives the command.

Milgram was intrigued by Asch’s discovery of how easily people could be swayed by group pressure. But Milgram wanted to investigate behavior that had greater personal significance than simply judging line lengths on a card (Milgram, 1963). Thus, Milgram posed what he saw as the most critical question: Could a person be pressured by others into committing an immoral act, some action that violated his or her own conscience, such as hurting a stranger? In his efforts to answer that question, Milgram embarked on one of the most systematic and controversial investigations in the history of psychology: to determine how and why people obey the destructive dictates of an authority figure (Blass, 2009; Russell, 2011).

Milgram’s Original Obedience Experiment

Milgram was only 28 years old and a new faculty member at Yale University when he conducted his first obedience experiments. He recruited participants through direct-mail solicitations and ads in the local paper. Milgram’s participants represented a wide range of occupational and educational backgrounds. Postal workers, high school teachers, white-collar workers, engineers, and laborers participated in the study.

Outwardly, it appeared that two participants showed up at the same time at Yale University to take part in the psychology experiment, but the second participant was actually a 47-year-old accountant who had been carefully rehearsed for his part in the experimental deception. The experimenter told both participants, “Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage.”

The individual who is commanded by a legitimate authority ordinarily obeys. Obedience comes easily and often. It is a ubiquitous and indispensable feature of social life.

—Stanley Milgram (1963)
a mild-mannered, 47-year-old accountant who had been carefully rehearsed for his part in the drama. Assigned to the role of the teacher, the real participant would be responsible for “punishing” the learner’s mistakes by administering electric shocks.

Immediately after the drawing, the teacher and learner were taken to another room, where the learner was strapped into an “electric chair.” The teacher was then taken to a different room, from which he could hear but not see the learner. Speaking into a microphone, the teacher tested the learner on a simple word-pair memory task. In the other room, the learner pressed one of four switches to indicate with which alternative the word had previously been paired. The learner’s response was registered in an answer box positioned on top of the “shock generator” in front of the teacher. Each time the learner answered incorrectly, the teacher was to deliver an electric shock.

Just in case there was any lingering doubt in the teacher’s mind about the legitimacy of the shock generator, the teacher was given a sample jolt using the switch marked 45 volts. In fact, this sample shock was the only real shock given during the course of the staged experiment.

The first time the learner answered incorrectly, the teacher was to deliver an electric shock at the 15-volt level. With each subsequent error, the teacher was told to progress to the next level on the shock generator. The teacher was also told to announce the voltage level to the learner before delivering the shock.

At predetermined voltage levels, the learner vocalized first his discomfort, then his pain, and, finally, agonized screams. Some of the learner’s vocalizations at the different voltage levels are shown in Table 11.3. After 330 volts, the learner’s script called for him to fall silent. If the teacher protested that he wished to stop or that he was worried about the learner’s safety, the experimenter would say, “The experiment requires that you continue” or “You have no other choice, you must continue.”

According to the script, the experiment would be halted when the teacher refused to obey the experimenter’s orders to continue. Alternatively, if the teacher obeyed the experimenter, the experiment would be halted once the teacher had progressed all the way to the maximum shock level of 450 volts.

### Table 11.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voltage</th>
<th>Learner’s Protests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120 volts</td>
<td>Ugh! Hey, this really hurts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 volts</td>
<td>Ugh!! Experimenter! That’s all. Get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart’s starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart’s starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210 volts</td>
<td>Ugh!! Experimenter! Get me out of here. I’ve had enough. I won’t be in the experiment any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270 volts</td>
<td>(Agonized scream.) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out. Do you hear? Let me out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 volts</td>
<td>(Agonized scream.) I absolutely refuse to answer any more. Get me out of here. You can’t hold me here. Get me out. Get me out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315 volts</td>
<td>(Intensely agonized scream.) I told you I refuse to answer. I’m no longer part of this experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>330 volts</td>
<td>(Intense and prolonged agonized scream.) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart’s bothering me. Let me out, I tell you. (Hysterically.) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. You have no right to hold me here. Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! Let me out!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This table shows examples of the learner’s protests at different voltage levels. If the teacher administered shocks beyond the 330-volt level, the learner’s agonized screams were replaced with an ominous silence.

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**obedience** The performance of a behavior in response to a direct command.
Either way, after the experiment, the teacher was interviewed and it was explained that the learner had not actually received dangerous electric shocks. To underscore this point, a “friendly reconciliation” was arranged between the teacher and the learner, and the true purpose of the study was explained to the participant.

The Results of Milgram’s Original Experiment

Can you predict how Milgram’s participants behaved? Of the 40 participants, how many obeyed the experimenter and went to the full 450-volt level? On a more personal level, how do you think you would have behaved had you been one of Milgram’s participants?

Milgram himself asked psychiatrists, college students, and middle-class adults to predict how participants would behave (see Milgram, 1974a). All three groups predicted that all of Milgram’s participants would refuse to obey at some point. None of those surveyed thought that any of Milgram’s participants would go to the full 450 volts.

As it turned out, they were all wrong. Two-thirds of Milgram’s participants—26 of the 40—were fully compliant and went to the full 450-volt level. And of those who defied the experimenter, not one stopped before the 300-volt level. Table 11.4 on the next page shows the results of Milgram’s original obedience study.

Surprised? Milgram himself was stunned by the results, never expecting that the majority of subjects would administer the maximum voltage. Were his results a fluke? Did Milgram inadvertently assemble a sadistic group of New Haven residents who were all too willing to inflict extremely painful, even life-threatening, shocks on a complete stranger?

The answer to both these questions is no. Milgram’s obedience study has been repeated many times in the United States and other countries (see Blass, 2000, 2012). And, in fact, Milgram (1974a) replicated his own study on numerous occasions, using variations of his basic experimental procedure.

In one replication, for instance, Milgram’s participants were 40 women. The results were identical. Confirming Milgram’s results since then, eight other studies also found no sex differences in obedience to an authority figure (see Blass, 2000, 2004; Burger, 2009).

Perhaps Milgram’s participants saw through his elaborate experimental hoax, as some critics have suggested (Orne & Holland, 1968). Was it possible that the participants did not believe that they were really harming the learner? Again, the answer seems to be no. Most of Milgram’s participants seemed totally convinced that the situation was authentic. And they did not behave in a cold-blooded, unfeeling way. Far from it. As the experiment progressed, many participants showed signs of extreme tension and conflict.

In describing the reaction of one participant, Milgram (1963) wrote, “I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse.” Extreme reactions like this one have led people to question the ethics of Milgram’s experiment (Perry, 2013).

Making Sense of Milgram’s Findings

MULTIPLE INFLUENCES

Milgram, along with other researchers, identified several aspects of the experimental situation that had a strong impact on the participants (see Blass, 1992, 2000; Milgram, 1965). Overall, he demonstrated that the rate of obedience rose or fell depending upon the situational variables the participants experienced (Zimbardo, 2007). Here are some of the forces that influenced participants to continue obeying the experimenter’s orders:

• A previously well-established mental framework to obey. Having volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment, Milgram’s participants arrived...
at the lab with the mental expectation that they would obediently follow the directions of the person in charge—the experimenter.

- **The situation, or context, in which the obedience occurred.** The participants were familiar with the basic nature of scientific investigation, believed that scientific research was worthwhile, and were told that the goal of the experiment was to “advance the scientific understanding of learning and memory” (Milgram, 1974a). All these factors predisposed the subjects to trust and respect the experimenter’s authority (Darley, 1992).

- **The gradual, repetitive escalation of the task.** At the beginning of the experiment, the participant administered a very low level of shock—15 volts. Participants could easily justify using such low levels of electric shock in the service of science. The shocks, like the learner’s protests, escalated only gradually.

- **The experimenter’s behavior and reassurances.** Many participants asked the experimenter who was responsible for what might happen to the learner. In every case, the teacher was reassured that the experimenter was responsible for the learner’s well-being. Thus, the participants could believe that they were not responsible for the consequences of their actions.

- **The physical and psychological separation from the learner.** Several “buffers” distanced the participant from the pain that he was inflicting on the learner. First, the learner was in a separate room and not visible. Only his voice could be heard. Second, punishment was depersonalized: The participant simply pushed a switch on the shock generator. Finally, the learner never appealed directly to the teacher to stop shocking him. The learner’s pleas were always directed toward the experimenter, as in “Experimenter! Get me out of here!” Undoubtedly, this contributed to the participant’s sense that the experimenter, rather than the participant, was ultimately in control of the situation, including the teacher’s behavior.

- **Confidence that the learner was actually receiving shocks.** There is evidence suggesting that at least some of Milgram’s participants suspected that the learner was not receiving shocks. Milgram (1965) reported that only 56.1% of participants “fully believed the learner was getting painful shocks.” Others had doubts to varying degrees, and as doubts increased, the likelihood of obeying also increased. Conversely, those most confident that the learner was actually receiving shocks were less likely to obey. Psychologist Gina Perry (2013) spent several years immersing herself in the archives at Yale and interviewing many researchers and participants associated with Milgram’s studies. She discovered unpublished data, compiled by Milgram’s research assistant, Taketo Murata. Across the 23 variations of Milgram’s experiments, Murata found that participants were more likely to disobey if they believed the learner was actually receiving shocks.

### Conditions That Undermine Obedience

**VARIATIONS ON A THEME**

In a lengthy series of experiments, Milgram systematically varied the basic obedience paradigm. To give you some sense of the enormity of Milgram’s undertaking, approximately 1,000 participants, each tested individually, experienced some variation of Milgram’s obedience experiment.

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**TABLE 11.4**

The Results of Milgram’s Original Study

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

**SOURCE:** Data from Milgram (1974a).
By varying his experiments, Milgram identified several conditions that decreased the likelihood of destructive obedience, which are summarized in Figure 11.4. For example, willingness to obey diminished sharply when the buffers that separated the teacher from the learner were lessened or removed, such as when both of them were in the same room.

If Milgram’s findings seem to cast an unfavorable light on human nature, there are two reasons to take heart. First, when teachers were allowed to act as their own authority and freely choose the shock level, 95 percent of them did not venture beyond 150 volts—the first point at which the learner protested. Clearly, Milgram’s participants were not responding to their own aggressive or sadistic impulses, but rather to orders from an authority figure (see Reeder & others, 2008).

Second, Milgram found that people were more likely to muster up the courage to defy an authority when they saw others do so. When Milgram’s participants observed what they thought were two other participants disobeying the experimenter, the real participants followed their lead 90 percent of the time and refused to continue. Like the participants in Asch’s experiment, Milgram’s participants were more likely to stand by their convictions when they were not alone in expressing them. Despite these encouraging notes, the overall results of Milgram’s obedience research painted a bleak picture of human nature.

Many people wonder whether Milgram would get the same results if his experiments were repeated today. Are people still as likely to obey an authority figure? There have been several replications or partial replications in recent years, including one by psychologist Jerry Burger and several by entertainment or news media including on the Discovery Channel show Curiosity, a BBC documentary, and DatelineNBC (BBC News, 2008; Burger, 2009; Lowry, 2011; Perry, 2013).

In one example, using methods similar to Milgram’s, French researchers found high levels of obedience in a game-show setting in a TV studio where participants obeyed a television host (Beauvois & others, 2012). In the show, called Game of Death,
the researchers used all the trappings of a television production to convince participants that the situation was real—a glamorous and well-known host, professional cameras, spotlights, a comedian to warm up the audience, and a live audience naïve to the actual goal of the situation.

The researchers recruited 76 participants from Paris, having excluded anyone who was aware of Milgram’s research. Participants were asked to shock another “contestant” every time he answered a question incorrectly. (As in Milgram’s study, the “contestant” was an actor who was not actually receiving shocks.) The game show host used prompts similar to those used by Milgram’s experimenter, and she had an added encouragement available to her—having the audience intervene. The researchers explained that “in power-based and situation-based terms, the host-questioner rapport in the present study was very close to the researcher-professor situation in Milgram’s study” (Beauvois & others, 2012).

So, what do you think happened? Eighty-one percent of participants obeyed, a figure higher than, although not statistically different from, Milgram’s findings. Importantly, unlike in Milgram’s era, there was an immediate international outcry about the ethics of putting unwitting participants in such a situation.

More than 40 years after the publication of Milgram’s research, the moral issues that his findings highlighted are still with us. We discuss a contemporary instance of destructive obedience in the Critical Thinking box on the next page, “Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Why Do Ordinary People Commit Evil Acts?”

Asch, Milgram, and the Real World

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE CLASSIC SOCIAL INFLUENCE STUDIES**

The scientific study of conformity and obedience has produced some important insights. The first is the degree to which our behavior is influenced by situational factors (see Benjamin & Simpson, 2009; Zimbardo, 2007). Being at odds with the majority or with authority figures is very uncomfortable for most people—enough so that our judgment and perceptions can be distorted and we may act in ways that violate our conscience.

More important, perhaps, is the insight that each of us does have the capacity to resist group or authority pressure (Bocchiaro & Zimbardo, 2010). Because the
Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Why Do Ordinary People Commit Evil Acts?

When the first photos appeared from Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, Iraq, people around the world were shocked. The photos graphically depicted Iraqi prisoners being humiliated, abused, and beaten by U.S. military personnel. In one photo, an Iraqi prisoner stood naked with feces smeared on his face and body. Smiling American soldiers, both male and female, posed alongside the corpse of a beaten Iraqi prisoner, giving the thumbs-up sign for the camera.

In the international uproar that followed, U.S. political leaders and Defense Department officials scrambled, damage control their priority. “A few bad apples” was the official pronouncement—just isolated incidents of sadistic soldiers run amok. The “bad apples” were identified and arrested: nine members of an Army Reserve unit based in Maryland.

Why would ordinary Americans mistreat people like that? How can normal people commit such cruel, immoral acts?

Unless we learn the dynamics of “why,” we will never be able to counteract the powerful forces that can transform ordinary people into evil perpetrators.

—Philip Zimbardo, (2004b)

What actually happened at Abu Ghraib?

At its peak population in early 2004, the Abu Ghraib prison complex housed more than 6,000 Iraqis who had been detained during the American invasion and occupation of Iraq (James, 2008).

There had been numerous reports of mistreatment at Abu Ghraib, including official complaints by the International Red Cross. However, most Americans had no knowledge of the prison conditions until photographs documenting shocking incidents of abuse were shown in the national media (Hersh, 2004a, 2004b).

What factors contributed to the events that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison?

Multiple elements combined to create the conditions for brutality, including in-group versus out-group thinking, negative stereotypes, dehumanization, and prejudice. The Iraqi prisoners were of a different culture, ethnic group, and religion than the prison guards, none of whom spoke Arabic. Categorizing the prisoners as a dangerous and threatening out-group allowed the American guards to dehumanize the detainees (Fiske & others, 2004).

The worst incidents took place in a cell block that held the prisoners who had been identified as potential “terrorists” or “insurgents” (Hersh, 2005). The guards were led to believe that it was their patriotic duty to mistreat these potential terrorists in order to help extract useful information (Kelman, 2005; Post, 2011; Taguba, 2004). Thinking in this way also helped reduce any cognitive dissonance the soldiers might have been experiencing by justifying the aggression.

Is what happened at Abu Ghraib similar to what happened in Milgram’s studies?

Milgram’s controversial studies showed that even ordinary citizens will obey an authority figure and commit acts of destructive obedience. Some of the accused soldiers, like Army Reserve Private Lynndie England, did claim that they were “just following orders.” Photographs of England, especially the one in which she was holding a naked male prisoner on a leash, created international outrage and revulsion. But England (2004) testified that her superiors praised the photos, saying, “Hey, you’re doing great, keep it up.”

But were the guards “just following orders”?

During the court-martials, soldiers who were called as witnesses for the prosecution testified that no direct orders were given to mistreat prisoners (Zernike, 2004). However, as a classic and controversial study by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues (1973) showed, implied social norms and roles can be just as powerful as explicit orders.

The study that became known as the Stanford Prison Experiment was conducted in 1971 (Haney & others, 1973). Twenty-four male college students were randomly assigned to be either prisoners or prison guards. They played their roles in a makeshift but realistic prison that had been set up in the basement of a Stanford University building. All of the participants had been evaluated and judged to be psychologically healthy, well-adjusted individuals.
Experimenter: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Mr. Rensaleer: Well, I won’t—not with the man screaming to get out.

Experimenter: You have no other choice.

Mr. Rensaleer: I do have a choice. (Incredulous and indignant) Why don’t I have a choice? I came here on my own free will. I thought I could help in a research project. But if I have

Originally, the study was slated to run for two weeks. But after just six days, the situation was spinning out of control. As Zimbardo (2005) recalls, “Within a few days, those assigned to the guard role became abusive, red-necked prison guards. . . . Within 36 hours the first prisoner had an emotional breakdown, crying, screaming, and thinking irrationally.” In all, five participants had emotional breakdowns (Drury & others, 2012). Prisoners who did not have extreme stress reactions became passive and depressed.

While Milgram’s experiments showed the effects of direct authority pressure, the Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrated the powerful influence of situational roles and conformity to implied social rules and norms. These influences are especially pronounced in vague or novel situations where normative social influence is more likely (Zimbardo, 2007). When people are not certain what to do, they tend to rely on cues provided by others and to conform their behavior to that of those in their immediate group (Fiske & others, 2004).

It’s important to note, however, that researchers have questioned whether it was only normative social influence that guided the behavior of the Stanford Prison Experiment participants (Griggs, 2014). For example, some psychologists noted that Zimbardo and his colleagues had been very directive with the guards (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). In 2002, a new study conducted in the United Kingdom was filmed for a show by the British Broadcasting Corporation. In this study, called the BBC Prison Experiment, the guards were not given directions as to how to treat the prisoners. What happened? The guards did not act abusively toward the prisoners. Thus, the researchers concluded that demand characteristics are cues that suggest to participants how they should respond. The psychologists concluded that similar cues may have been present in the “culture” of the Abu Ghraib prison.

At Abu Ghraib, the accused soldiers received no special training and were ignorant of regulations regarding the treatment of civilian detainees or enemy prisoners of war (see James, 2008; Zimbardo, 2007). Guards apparently took their cues from one another and from the military intelligence personnel who encouraged them to “set the conditions” for interrogation (Hersh, 2005; Taguba, 2004).

Other factors might also be at play in situations like Abu Ghraib. For example, researchers found that participants who signed up for a study described to be about prison were more likely to have qualities related to the potential to abuse others—such as aggression, narcissism, and dominance—than those signing up for other studies (Carnaahan & McFarland, 2007). These researchers noted that this self-selection was likely to be true in military contexts, such as Abu Ghraib, as well.

Are people helpless to resist destructive obedience in a situation like Abu Ghraib prison?

No. As Milgram demonstrated, people can and do resist pressure to perform evil actions. Not all military personnel at Abu Ghraib went along with the pressure to mistreat prisoners (Hersh, 2005; Taguba, 2004). Consider these examples:

- Master-at-Arms William J. Kimbro, a Navy dog handler, adamantly refused to participate in improper interrogations using dogs to intimidate prisoners despite being pressured by military intelligence personnel (Hersh, 2004b).
- When handed a CD filled with digital photographs depicting prisoners being abused and humiliated, Specialist Joseph M. Darby turned it over to the Army Criminal Investigation Division. It was Darby’s conscientious action that finally prompted a formal investigation of the prison.

At the court-martial, army witnesses testified that the abusive treatment would never be allowed under any stretch of the normal rules for handling inmates in a military prison (Zernike, 2004).

In fact, as General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated forcefully in a November 2005 press conference, “It is absolutely the responsibility of every U.S. service member, if they see inhumane treatment being conducted, to intervene to stop it.”

Finally, it’s important to point out that understanding the factors that contributed to the events at Abu Ghraib does not excuse the perpetrators’ behavior or absolve them of individual responsibility. And, as Milgram’s research shows, the action of even one outspoken dissenter can inspire others to resist unethical or illegal commands from an authority figure (Packer, 2008a).

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- How might the fundamental attribution error lead people to blame “a few bad apples” rather than noticing situational factors that contributed to the Abu Ghraib prison abuse?
- Who should be held responsible for the inhumane conditions and abuse that occurred at Abu Ghraib prison?
Resisting an Authority’s Unacceptable Orders

- Verify your own discomfort by asking yourself, “Is this something I would do if I were controlling the situation?”
- Express your discomfort. It can be as simple as saying, “I’m really not comfortable with this.”
- Resist even slightly objectionable commands so that the situation doesn’t escalate into increasingly immoral or destructive obedience.
- If you realize you’ve already done something unacceptable, stop at that point rather than continuing to comply.
- Find or create an excuse to get out of the situation and validate your concerns with someone who is not involved with the situation.
- Question the legitimacy of the authority. Most authorities have legitimacy only in specific situations. If authorities are out of their legitimate context, they have no more authority in the situation than you do.
- If it is a group situation, find an ally who also feels uncomfortable with the authority’s orders. Two people expressing dissent in harmony can effectively resist conforming to the group’s actions.


Kitty Genovese (1935–1964) Known as Kitty by her friends, Genovese had grown up in Brooklyn. As a young woman, she managed a sports bar in Queens, shown here.

Altruism and Aggression

HELPING AND HURTING BEHAVIOR

KEY THEME

Prosocial behavior describes any behavior that helps another person, including altruistic acts. Aggression describes behavior that is intended to harm another person.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What factors increase the likelihood that people will help a stranger?
- What factors decrease the likelihood that people will help a stranger?
- How can the lack of bystander response in the Genovese murder case be explained in light of psychological research on helping behavior?
- What factors increase the likelihood that people will harm another person?

It was about 3:20 A.M. on Friday, March 13, 1964, when 28-year-old Kitty Genovese returned home from her job managing a bar. Like other residents in her middle-class New York City neighborhood, she parked her car at an adjacent railroad station. Her apartment entrance was only 100 feet away.

As she got out of her car, she noticed a man at the end of the parking lot. When the man moved in her direction, she began walking toward a nearby police call box, which was under a streetlight in front of a bookstore. On the opposite side of the street was a 10-story apartment building. As she neared the streetlight, the man grabbed her and she screamed. Across the street, lights went on in the apartment building. “Oh, my God! He stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!” she screamed.

“Let that girl alone!” a man yelled from one of the upper apartment windows. As she got out of her car, she noticed a man at the end of the parking lot. When the man moved in her direction, she began walking toward a nearby police call box, which was under a streetlight in front of a bookstore. On the opposite side of the street was a 10-story apartment building. As she neared the streetlight, the man grabbed her and she screamed. Across the street, lights went on in the apartment building. “Oh, my God! He stabbed me! Please help me! Please help me!” she screamed.

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One by one, lights went off. Struggling to her feet, Kitty made her way toward her apartment. As she rounded the corner of the building moments later, her assailant returned, stabbing her again. “I’m dying! I’m dying!” she screamed.

Again, lights went on. Windows opened and people looked out. This time, the assailant got into his car and drove off. It was now 3:35 A.M. Fifteen minutes had passed since Kitty’s first screams for help. A New York City bus passed by. Staggering, then crawling, Kitty moved toward the entrance of her apartment. She never made it. Her attacker returned, searching the apartment entrance doors. At the second apartment entrance, he found her, slumped at the foot of the steps. This time, he stabbed her to death.

It was 3:50 A.M. when someone first called the police. The police took just two minutes to arrive at the scene. About half an hour later, an ambulance carried Kitty Genovese’s body away. Only then did people come out of their apartments to talk to the police.

Over the next two weeks, police investigators learned that a total of 38 people had witnessed Kitty’s murder—a murder that involved three separate attacks over a period of about 30 minutes. Why didn’t anyone try to help her? Or call the police when she first screamed for help?

When The New York Times interviewed various experts, they seemed baffled, although one expert said it was a “typical” reaction (Mohr, 1964). If there was a common theme in their explanations, it seemed to be “apathy.” The occurrence was simply representative of the alienation and depersonalization of life in a big city, people said (see Rosenthal, 1964a, 1964b).

Not everyone bought this pat explanation. In the first place, it wasn’t true. As social psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley (1970) later pointed out in their landmark book, The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn’t He Help?:

People often help others, even at great personal risk to themselves. For every “apathy” story, one of outright heroism could be cited. . . . People sometimes help and sometimes don’t. What determines when help will be given?

That’s the critical question, of course. When do people help others? And why do people help others?

When we help another person with no expectation of personal benefit, we’re displaying altruism (Batson & others, 2011). An altruistic act is fundamentally selfless—the individual is motivated purely by the desire to help someone in need. Everyday life is filled with little acts of altruistic kindness, such as Fern giving the “homeless” man a handful of quarters or the stranger who thoughtfully holds a door open for you as you juggle an armful of packages.

Altruistic actions fall under the broader heading of prosocial behavior, which describes any behavior that helps another person, whatever the underlying motive. Note that prosocial behaviors are not necessarily altruistic. Sometimes we help others out of guilt. And, sometimes we help others in order to gain something, such as recognition, rewards, increased self-esteem, or having the favor returned (Batson & others, 2011). Whatever the reason, there is evidence from neuroscience research that some
forms of prosocial behavior lead to activation in the brain structures associated with rewards (Kurzban & others, 2015). Researchers suggest that such findings highlight possible evolutionary causes for altruistic behavior.

Factors That Increase the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

Kitty Genovese’s death triggered hundreds of investigations into the conditions under which people will help others (Dovidio, 1984; Dovidio & others, 2006). Those studies began in the 1960s with the pioneering efforts of Bibb Latané and John Darley, who conducted a series of ingenious experiments in which it appears that help is needed. For example, in one study, participants believed they were overhearing an epileptic seizure (Darley & Latané, 1968). In another study, participants were in a room that started to fill with smoke (Latané & Darley, 1968).

Based on these studies, Latané and Darley concluded that people must pass through three stages before they offer help. First, they must notice an emergency situation. Second, they must interpret it as a situation that actually requires help. Third, they must decide that it is their responsibility to offer help (Latané & Darley, 1968).

Other researchers joined the effort to understand what factors influence a person’s decision to help another (see Dovidio & others, 2006; Fischer & others, 2011; Zaki & Mitchell, 2013). Some of the most significant factors that increase the likelihood of helping include:

- **The “feel good, do good” effect.** People who feel good, successful, happy, or fortunate are more likely to decide to help others (see Forgas & others, 2008; C. Miller, 2009). Those good feelings can be due to virtually any positive event, such as succeeding at a task or even just enjoying a warm, sunny day.

- **Feeling guilty.** We tend to be more helpful when we’re feeling guilty. For example, after telling a lie or inadvertently causing an accident, people were more likely to decide to help others (Basil & others, 2006; Cohen & others, 2012; de Hooge & others, 2011).

- **Seeing others who are willing to help.** Whether it’s donating blood or helping a stranded motorist change a flat tire, we’re more likely to decide to help if we observe others do the same (Fischer & others, 2011). This is true even when we are the recipient of help (Tsvetkova & Macy, 2014).

- **Perceiving the other person as deserving help.** We’re more likely to decide to help people who are in need of help through no fault of their own. For example, people are twice as likely to give some change to a stranger if they believe the stranger’s wallet has been stolen than if they believe the stranger has simply spent all his money (Burn, 2009; Laner & others, 2001; Latané & Darley, 1970). Similarly, people are more likely to support welfare programs if they believe that the welfare recipients are actively trying to find a job (Petersen & others, 2012).

- **Knowing how to help.** Research has confirmed that knowing what to do and being physically capable of helping contributes greatly to the decision to help someone else (Fischer & others, 2011; Steg & de Groot, 2010). In line with this, some universities have implemented bystander training to give students skills to intervene, for example, to prevent a sexual assault (Hua, 2013; University of Arizona, n.d.).

- **A personalized relationship.** When people have any sort of personal relationship with another person, even at the level of simply making eye contact with someone, they’re more likely to decide to help that person (Solomon & others, 1981; Vrugt & Vet, 2009). This might explain why researchers have observed that people are less likely to help in anonymous online contexts than in the “real
Altruism and Aggression

world” (Barlińska & others, 2013). When online interactions are not anonymous, a personal relationship makes people more likely to help, for example in cyber-bullying situations (Macháčková & others, 2013).

• A dangerous situation. People also are more likely to decide to help in dangerous situations—those that are clearly an emergency, those when the perpetrator is present, and those that present a physical risk to the helper (Fischer & others, 2011). Even in an online context, bystanders are more likely to intervene in cyberbullying when it is more severe (Bastiaensens, & others, 2014). These findings might seem surprising, but it may be that these are situations in which it is clear that help is needed.

Factors That Decrease the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

Unfortunately, instances in which bystanders fail to intervene are still regularly reported. For example, during spring break revels on a Florida beach, police reported a gang rape that occurred while hundreds of people watched (Southall, 2015). And in Philadelphia, when a woman on a bus passed out, evidently from drug or alcohol use, bystanders just filmed the situation while her young daughter tried to rouse her (Gambacorta, 2014). A police official said, “There’s very little reason why 15 calls to 9-1-1 weren’t received.”

Given examples like these and many others, it’s important to consider influences that decrease the likelihood of helping behavior. As we look at some of the key findings, we’ll also note how each factor might have played a role in the death of Kitty Genovese.

• The presence of other people. In general, people are much more likely to decide to help when they are alone (Fischer & others, 2011; Latané & Nida, 1981). If other people are present or imagined, helping behavior declines—a phenomenon called the bystander effect. This effect has even been observed in five-year-old children. One study found that children were more likely to help a teacher when they were alone or when the only other children present were behind a barrier and physically unable to help (Plötner & others, 2015).

There seem to be two major reasons for the bystander effect. First, the presence of other people creates a diffusion of responsibility. The responsibility to intervene is shared (or diffused) among all the onlookers. Because no one person feels all the pressure to respond, each bystander becomes less likely to help.

Ironically, the sheer number of bystanders seemed to be the most significant factor working against Kitty Genovese. Remember that when she first screamed, a man yelled down, “Let that girl alone!” With that, each observer instantly knew that he or she was not the only one watching the events on the street below. Hence, no single individual felt the full responsibility to help.

Second, the bystander effect seems to occur because each of us is motivated to some extent by the desire to behave in a socially acceptable way (normative social influence) and to appear correct (informational social influence). In the case of Kitty Genovese, the lack of intervention by any of the witnesses may have signaled the others that intervention was not appropriate, wanted, or needed.

• Being in a big city or a very small town. Kitty Genovese was attacked late at night in one of the biggest cities in the world. Research by Robert Levine and his colleagues (2008) confirmed that people are less likely to decide to help
strangers in big cities, but other aspects of city life, like crowding and economic status, also affect helping. On the other hand, people are also less likely to help a stranger in towns with populations under 5,000 (Steblay, 1987).

- **Vague or ambiguous situations.** When situations are ambiguous and people are not certain that help is needed, they’re less likely to decide to offer help (Solomon & others, 1978). The ambiguity of the situation may also have worked against Kitty Genovese. The people in the apartment building saw a man and a woman struggling on the street below but had no way of knowing whether the two were acquainted. “We thought it was a lovers’ quarrel,” some of the witnesses later said (Gansberg, 1964). Researchers have found that people are especially reluctant to intervene when the situation appears to be a domestic dispute, because they are not certain that assistance is wanted (Gracia & others, 2009). In a recent incident in Jersey City, NJ, a woman was fatally stabbed by her ex-boyfriend. A neighbor who heard the attack reportedly “went back to bed, not wanting to get involved” in what he likely perceived as a domestic dispute (Villanova, 2014).

- **When the personal costs for helping outweigh the benefits.** As a general rule, we tend to weigh the costs as well as the benefits of helping in deciding whether to act. If the potential costs outweigh the benefits, it’s less likely that people will help (Fischer & others, 2006, 2011). The witnesses in the Genovese case may have felt that the benefits of helping Genovese were outweighed by the potential hassles and danger of becoming involved in the situation.

On a small yet universal scale, the murder of Kitty Genovese dramatically underscores the power of situational and social influences to affect our behavior. Although social psychological research has provided insights about the factors that influenced the behavior of those who witnessed the Genovese murder, it should not be construed as a justification for the inaction of the bystanders. After all, Kitty Genovese’s death probably could have been prevented by a single phone call. If we understand the factors that decrease helping behavior, we can recognize and overcome those obstacles when we encounter someone who needs assistance. If you had been Kitty Genovese—or if Kitty Genovese had been your sister, friend, or classmate—how would you have hoped other people would react?

**Aggression**

**HURTING BEHAVIOR**

The flip side of helping behavior is hurting behavior, or **aggression**—any verbal or physical behavior intended to cause harm to other people. To be classified as aggression, the aggressor must believe that their behavior is harmful to the other person, and the other person must not wish to be harmed (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). A child who hits her little brother, a mugger who threatens his victim, a boss who screams at her subordinates, or a terrorist who fires shots in a crowded mall—all are engaged in acts of aggression. But the doctor who knowingly inflicts pain while setting a broken arm is not.

Have you ever wondered about the wide variation in aggressive tendencies? Why does one friend threaten a fistfight when provoked, while another calmly walks away? Like helping behavior, hurting behavior is driven by a range of factors—biological, psychological, and sociocultural.

**THE INFLUENCE OF BIOLOGY ON AGGRESSION**

Researchers have long thought that our tendency to behave aggressively has a biological component. Biological theories of aggression include genetic, structural, and biochemical explanations.

**The Influence of Genes and Brain Structure** When someone behaves aggressively, how do we know if that is driven, even in part, by inborn personality characteristics? There have been a number of studies that tried to separate the effects of genes and
environmental influences in rates of aggression. For example, one study found that identical twins had similar aggressive tendencies whether or not they were raised together. Because twins share 100% of their genes, this finding indicates a strong genetic influence on aggressive behavior (Bouchard & others, 1990; Segal, 2012). Two meta-analyses that explored studies on heredity and aggression concluded that genetics played a significant role in people's levels of aggressiveness (Ferguson, 2010; Miles & Carey, 1997).

The presence of behaviors that appear to be driven, at least in part, by genetics leads to questions about whether these behaviors have an evolutionary basis. That is, are there adaptive benefits to having a genetic predisposition toward aggression, at least in certain contexts? Evolutionary theorists say yes (Ferguson & Beaver, 2009). Aggression, they assert, can help people to acquire or secure resources for themselves and for those who share their genes (Buss & Duntley, 2006).

Another biological explanation for aggression points to differences in the parts of the brain that regulate emotion, including the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex, and the limbic system (Bobes & others, 2013; Davidson & others, 2000; Meyer-Lindenberg & others, 2006). For example, researchers have observed differences in the prefrontal cortex of people who are prone to aggressive and angry outbursts (Best & others, 2002).

Biochemical Influences Biochemical influences on aggression include the hormone testosterone and alcohol abuse. For example, Irene van Bokhoven and her colleagues (2006) followed 96 boys from kindergarten through age 21. They found that boys who had higher levels of testosterone over this period were more likely to have criminal records as adults. This tendency is not limited to men. Both male and female college students who had committed acts of violence or engaged in drug use were found to have higher rates of testosterone (Banks & Dabbs, 1996). And a link between testosterone and aggression has been found among female prisoners (Dabbs & Hargrove, 1997).

However, it's important not to overstate the link between testosterone and aggression. In a meta-analysis of 45 studies, Angela Book and her colleagues (2001) found only a weak relationship between the two. Further, some researchers point out that high testosterone can also have positive effects. For example, it may be linked to good negotiation and leadership skills (Yildirim & Derksen, 2012).

Although most people who consume alcohol are not violent, the rate of violence is higher among those under the influence of alcohol than among those who have not consumed alcohol (Duke & others, 2011; Pedersen & others, 2014). This effect has been established in both laboratory and everyday settings (Chermack & Taylor, 1995; Exum, 2006; Graham & others, 2006). One research team bravely spent over 1,000 nights in over 100 bars in Toronto, Canada, and logged more than 1,000 violent incidents. As the crowd became more intoxicated, aggressive incidents were more likely to occur. And, the aggressive person's level of intoxication was generally related to the severity of the violent act (Graham & others, 2006).

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON AGGRESSION

While it's clear that there are biological influences on aggression, there also are psychological influences. For example, a great deal of aggressive behavior is learned. In addition, there are situational factors that can increase people's tendency to be aggressive.

Learning People who are violent are often mimicking behavior they have seen, a form of observational learning. For example, in Chapter 5, you read about Albert Bandura's classic Bobo Doll experiments in which children learned to behave aggressively toward a large balloon doll by watching a brief video in which an adult did the same. Exposure to violence may also lead to aggression over the longer term. Researchers have
found that both women and men exposed to violence in their families while growing up were more likely to abuse their partners and their children as adults (Heyman & Smith Slep, 2002). But a higher likelihood is not a guarantee that the family pattern of violence will be repeated. In fact, most people who were exposed to violence as children do not grow up to be abusers themselves.

There also is evidence that exposure to violence in the media—whether in a film, a video game, or music lyrics—might increase the likelihood that someone will behave aggressively, perhaps imitating the violence they viewed (Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014). For example, one experiment found that people randomly assigned to watching reality television shows that depicted aggression, such as The Jersey Shore, were more likely to then act in aggressive ways than people randomly assigned to watch non-aggressive reality TV or crime dramas like CSI (Gibson & others, 2014). (On the flip side, exposure to prosocial TV shows, movies, and video games—in which people helped one another—was related to increased helping behaviors (Prot & Others, 2014).)

In the Critical Thinking box “Does Exposure to Media Violence Cause Aggressive Behavior” in Chapter 5, you read about the evidence that viewing media violence is related to aggressive behavior (see Bushman & others, 2009). Viewing pornography, especially pornography depicting sexual violence, also has been linked to increased aggressive attitudes toward women (Hald & others, 2010). Although there is a strong link, it’s important to note that much of the research connecting media violence to actual aggressive behavior is correlational. Remember from Chapter 1 that correlational studies cannot tell us whether one variable, such as viewing pornography, causes another, such as aggression. The research that is experimental and could show causal links is primarily in artificial situations (Ferguson & Kilbourn, 2009).

Other forms of violent media, like violent video games, also have been linked to increased aggression. For example, one study followed more than 1,000 boys and girls throughout their high school years, and found that students who played violent video games throughout this time showed increases in aggressive behavior over the four years of the study (Willoughby & others, 2012). Listening to violent music lyrics—from heavy metal, rap, and rock songs—led participants in one study to be more aggressive. Compared with participants who listened to the same music without lyrics, they doled out larger amounts of a painful hot sauce for another (fictional) participant to consume (Brummert Lennings & Warburton, 2011). Because this was an experiment, we can safely conclude that listening to the violent lyrics caused the higher levels of aggressive behavior.

**Frustration**

Aggression can be learned, but it can also be driven by situational factors that are annoying or frustrating. For example, researchers have identified high temperatures as a source for frustration-linked aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Violence in Minneapolis increased as nighttime temperatures increased (Bushman & others, 2005). Even exposure to words associated with hotter temperatures—sunburn or sweats, for example—leads to increased hostility as compared with neutral or colder words (DeWall & Bushman, 2009). Temperature is also linked to violence on a global scale. As climate change leads to warmer temperatures globally, increased rates of conflict between individuals and between groups are being reported (Hsiang & others, 2013).

When frustrated by a stressful situation or an annoying person, people can react aggressively (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Jodi Whitaker and her colleagues (2013) conducted an experiment in which they created a situation that would be incredibly frustrating to their student participants. The students were invited to take an extremely difficult history test that could earn them desirable snacks for a top performance. Some students were then “mistakenly” given access to the answers—but were frustrated by
having the answers, and the chance to cheat, quickly taken away. After taking the test, students were asked to rate a series of violent and nonviolent video games. Students who were frustrated rated their desire to play violent video games higher than students who never had a chance to cheat or who never had their chance to cheat taken away.

When’s the last time you got really frustrated or angry? If you drive, it might have been behind the wheel. About one third of us admit to having been the aggressor in a road rage situation, and that’s particularly true of younger drivers and male drivers (Smart & others, 2003). Road rage results from a number of factors, especially frustration—the frustration that results when we perceive inappropriate or reckless driving behavior, when there is heavy traffic, or when we’re running late (Wickens & others, 2013). These factors are even more frustrating—and even more likely to lead to aggression—when we’re already stressed out for other reasons (Wickens & others, 2013).

**GENDER, CULTURE, AND AGGRESSION**

Quick—which gender do you think is more likely to engage in aggressive behavior? In this case, the stereotype that males are the more aggressive gender is true, on average. (But just on average. As with every psychology finding, there are lots of exceptions.) Psychologist John Archer (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of aggression in real-world settings. He concluded that “Direct, especially physical, aggression was more common in males than females at all ages sampled, was consistent across cultures, and occurred from early childhood on, showing a peak between 20 and 30 years.” Research suggests, however, that girls and women are just as aggressive as boys in *indirect* aggression, which refers to aggression related to interactions, such as gossiping and spreading rumors (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Why are men more likely than women to behave in physically aggressive ways? There may be biological reasons. Evolutionary theorists suggest that the gender difference is due to the fact that men are more likely to reproduce if they have access to desirable mating partners, something that is more likely for men with resources—which can be acquired through aggression (Bus & Duntley, 2006). In addition, men are more likely to use aggression in the context of mating. For example, in an experiment, men who thought about sexual topics were more likely to behave aggressively than men who thought about topics related to happiness (Ainsworth & Maner, 2012).

But there also are environmental explanations. The ways in which girls and boys exhibit aggression are influenced by the reactions of others. Children learn aggression-related scripts—or guides for how they should act—by responding to input from peers and teachers, parents and other family members, and the media (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010). Cultural factors also influence aggressive behavior and attitudes. Aggression and violence seem to be more common in certain types of societies (Bond, 2004). These include societies that are less economically developed, that have higher levels of economic inequality, and that are not democracies (Bond, 2004). Researchers have also found that there are regional and national differences in certain types of aggression based on the concept of a culture of honor (Vandello & others, 2008). A *culture of honor* is one in which actions perceived as damaging your reputation must be addressed (Vandello & Cohen, 2004). In some countries, such as Turkey, the culture of honor is focused on offenses against one’s family (Cihangir, 2013; van Osch & others, 2013).

In the Americas, especially the southern United States and Latin America, the culture of violence tends to be based on masculine honor. Psychologist Joseph Vandello and his colleagues (2008) describe masculine honor as having “an emphasis on masculinity and male toughness.” In such cultures, violence that is seen as helping a man restore his reputation is more acceptable. For example, if a man is mocked at a sporting event, a violent response might be seen as reasonable or even admirable (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Masculine honor culture, although usually regional, can also be contextual. Some researchers have observed an aggression-inducing culture of masculine honor in North American bars (Graham & Wells, 2003).
Cultures with significant income inequality also have higher rates of aggression. Researchers have identified a strong link between income inequality and violence, particularly murder (Nivette, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). For example, a study of 33 countries found a very high correlation of 0.80 between the level of income inequality in a country and the homicide rate (Elgar & Aitken, 2010; see Figure 11.5). From Chapter 1, you may remember that the highest possible correlation is 1.00, indicating that two variables are perfectly related. A correlation of 0.80 is close to the highest you would see in social science research. Just the fact that this important cultural element is so tightly bound with extreme violence is an indication that sociocultural factors, in addition to biological and psychological factors, are important predictors of aggression.

Test your understanding of Altruism and Aggression with LEARNING Curve.

Closing Thoughts

We began this chapter with a prologue about Fern trying to help a stranger in a strange city. As it turned out, Fern’s social perceptions of the man were inaccurate: He was not a homeless person living on the streets of San Francisco. As simple as this incident was, it underscored a theme that was repeatedly echoed throughout our subsequent discussions of person perception, attribution, and attitudes. Our subjective impressions, whether they are accurate or not, play a pivotal role in how we perceive and think about other people.

A different theme emerged in our later discussions of conformity, obedience, helping behavior, and hurting behavior. Social and situational factors, especially the behavior of others in the same situation, can have powerful effects on how we act at a
given moment. But like Fern, each of us has the freedom to choose how we respond in a given situation. When we’re aware of the social forces that influence us, it can be easier for us to choose wisely.

In the final analysis, we are social animals who often influence one another’s thoughts, perceptions, and actions, sometimes in profound ways. In the following Psych for Your Life section, we’ll look at some of the ways that social psychological insights have been applied by professional persuaders—and how you can counteract attempts to persuade you.

### The Persuasion Game

At the time, Sandy’s and Don’s daughter, Laura, was only 3 1/2 years old, happily munching her Cheerios and doodling pictures in the butter on her bread. Don sat across from her at the kitchen table, reading a draft of this chapter. “Don’t play with your food, Laura,” Don said without looking up.

“Oh, Daddy,” she chirped. “Daddy, are you in a happy mood?” Don paused. “Yes, I’m in a happy mood, Laura,” he said thoughtfully. “Are you in a happy mood?”

“Yes, Daddy,” Laura replied as she made the banana peel dance around her placemat. “Daddy, will you get me a Mermaid Barbie doll for my birthday?”

Ah, so young and so clever! From very early in life, we learn the basics of persuasion—the deliberate attempt to influence the attitudes or behavior of another person in a situation in which that person has some freedom of choice. Clearly, Laura had figured out one basic rule: She’s more likely to persuade Mom or Dad when they’re in “a happy mood.”

Professional persuaders often manipulate people’s attitudes and behavior using techniques based on two fundamental social norms: the rule of reciprocity and the rule of commitment (Cialdini & Sagarin, 2005). Here we’ll provide you with some practical suggestions to avoid being taken in by persuasion techniques.

### The Rule of Reciprocity

The rule of reciprocity is a simple but powerful social norm (Burger & others, 2009; Shen & others, 2011). If someone gives you something or does you a favor, you feel obligated to return the favor. So after a classmate lets you copy her lecture notes for the class session you missed, you feel obligated to return a favor when she asks for one.

The “favor” can be almost anything freely given, such as a free food sample in a grocery store, a free gardening workshop at your local hardware store, or a free guide, booklet, planning kit, or trial. The rule of reciprocity is part of the sales strategy used by companies that offer “free” in-home trials of their products. It’s also why department stores that sell expensive cosmetics offer “free” makeovers.

Technically, you are under “no obligation” to buy anything. Nonetheless, the tactic often creates an uncomfortable sense of obligation, so you do feel pressured to reciprocate by buying the product (Cialdini, 2009).

One strategy that uses the rule of reciprocity is called the door-in-the-face technique (Turner & others, 2007). First, the persuader makes a large request that you’re certain to refuse. For example, Joe asks to borrow $500. You figuratively “slam the door in his face” by quickly turning him down. But then Joe, apologetic, appears to back off and makes a much smaller request—to borrow $20. From your perspective, it appears that Joe has made a concession to you and is trying to be reasonable. This puts you in the position of reciprocating with a concession of your own. “Well, I can’t lend you $500,” you grumble, “but I guess I could lend you 20 bucks.” Of course, the persuader’s real goal was to persuade you to comply with the second, smaller request.

The rule of reciprocity is also operating in the that’s-not-all technique (Burger, 2011). First, the persuader makes an offer. But before you can accept or reject it, the persuader appears to throw in something extra to make the

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**Psych for Your Life**

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**MYTH v SCIENCE**

Is it true that people who say no to a large request are more easily able to say no to smaller requests that follow?
deal even more attractive to you. So as you're standing there mulling over the price of the more expensive high-definition, flat-panel television, the salesperson says, “Listen, I'm offering you a great price but that's not all I'll do—I'll throw in some top-of-the-line HDMI connector cables at no charge.” From your perspective, it appears as though the salesperson has just done you a favor by making a concession you did not ask for. This creates a sense of obligation for you to reciprocate by buying the “better” package.

The Rule of Commitment

Another powerful social norm is the rule of commitment. Once you make a public commitment, there is psychological and interpersonal pressure on you to behave consistently with your earlier commitment. The foot-in-the-door technique is one strategy that capitalizes on the rule of commitment (Guéguen & others, 2008; Rodafinos & others, 2005). Here’s how it works.

First, the persuader makes a small request that you're likely to agree to. For example, she might stop you on the street and ask you to sign a petition supporting some social cause. By agreeing to do so, you’ve made a small commitment to the social cause. At that point, she has gotten her “foot in the door.” Next, the persuader asks you to comply with a second, larger request, such as making a donation to the group she represents. Because of your earlier commitment, you feel psychologically pressured to behave consistently by now agreeing to the larger commitment (Cialdini, 2009).

The rule of commitment is also operating in the low-ball technique. First, the persuader gets you to make a commitment by deliberately understating the cost of the product you want. He’s thrown you a “low ball,” one that is simply too good to turn down. In reality, the persuader has no intention of honoring the artificially low price.

Here's an example of the low-ball technique in action: You’ve negotiated an excellent price (the “low ball”) on a used car and filled out the sales contract. The car salesman shakes your hand and beams, then takes your paperwork into his manager’s office for approval. Ten minutes pass—enough time for you to convince yourself that you’ve made the right decision and solidify your commitment to it.

At that point, the salesman comes back from his manager’s office looking dejected. “I’m terribly sorry,” the car salesman says. “My manager won’t let me sell the car at that price because we’d lose too much money on the deal. I told him I would even take a lower commission, but he won’t budge.”

Notice what has happened. The attractive low-ball price that originally prompted you to make the commitment has been pulled out from under your feet. What typically happens? Despite the loss of the original inducement to make the purchase—the low-ball price—people often feel compelled to keep their commitment to make the purchase even though it is at a higher price (Cialdini, 2009).

Defending Against Persuasion Techniques

It is increasingly important to be aware that persuasive messages can impact your attitudes and behavior. For several years now, online advertisers have targeted messages directly to you based on your online behavior, such as your browsing history (Ur & others, 2012). But they may now also be targeting you based on your personality.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge teamed up with researchers at Microsoft and found that some of your personality traits, such as how outgoing or anxious you are, can be predicted from your Facebook profile (Bachrach & others, 2012). Related to this, other researchers found improved persuasion when ads were matched to personality (Hirsh & others, 2012). Specifically, for an ad for a cell phone, outgoing people responded best when they were promised “you’ll always be where the excitement is,” and anxious people responded best when they were told that the phone would help them “stay safe and secure.”

So, in a world where you are increasingly targeted, how can you reduce the likelihood that you’ll be manipulated into making a decision that may not be in your best interest? Here are three practical suggestions.

1. Sleep on it.

Persuasive transactions typically occur quickly. Part of this is our own doing. We’ve finally decided to go look at a new laptop, automobile, or whatever, so we’re psychologically primed to buy the product. The persuader uses this psychological momentum to help coax you into signing on the dotted line right then and there. It’s only later, of course, that you sometimes have second thoughts. So when you think you’ve got the deal you want, tell the persuader that you always sleep on important decisions before making a final commitment.

The sleep-on-it rule often provides an opportunity to discover whether the persuader is deliberately trying to pressure or manipulate you. If the persuader responds to your sleep-on-it suggestion by saying something like “This offer is good for today only,” then it’s likely that he or she is afraid that your commitment to the deal will crumble if you think about it too carefully or look elsewhere.

2. Play devil’s advocate.

List all of the reasons why you should not buy the product or make a particular commitment (Albarracin & Vargas, 2010; Crano & Prislin, 2006). Arguing against the decision will help activate your critical thinking skills. It’s also helpful to discuss important decisions with a friend, who might be able to point out disadvantages that you have overlooked.

3. When in doubt, do nothing.

Learn to trust your gut feelings when something doesn’t feel quite right. If you feel that you’re being psychologically pressured or cornered, you probably are. As a general rule, if you feel any sense of hesitation, lean toward the conservative side and do nothing. If you take the time to think things over, you’ll probably be able to identify the source of your reluctance.
**KEY PEOPLE AND KEY TERMS**

Solomon Asch, p. 472  
John M. Darley, p. 483  
social psychology, p. 454  
sense of self, p. 454  
social cognition, p. 454  
social influence, p. 454  
person perception, p. 455  
social norms, p. 455  
social categorization, p. 456  
explicit cognition, p. 456  
implicit cognition, p. 456  
implicit personality theory, p. 456  
Bibb Latané, p. 483  
Stanley Milgram, p. 474  
Muzaffer Sherif, p. 470  
Philip G. Zimbardo, p. 464  
stereotype, p. 466  
in-group, p. 467  
out-group, p. 467  
out-group homogeneity effect, p. 468  
in-group bias, p. 468  
imPLICIT ATTITUDES, p. 469  
attitude, p. 461  
cognitive dissonance, p. 464  
prejudice, p. 465  
actor-observer bias, p. 459  
hindsight bias, p. 459  
just-world hypothesis, p. 459  
self-serving bias, p. 460  
social influence, p. 454  
informational social influence, p. 473  
obeDience, p. 474  
altruism, p. 483  
prosocial behavior, p. 483  
bystander effect, p. 485  
diffusion of responsibility, p. 485  
aggression, p. 486  
persuasion, p. 491
Person Perception

Active process that occurs in an interpersonal context; influenced by:
- Sense of self
- Subjective perceptions
- Social norms
- Personal goals
- Self-perception

Person perception can involve mental shortcuts:
- Social categorization
- Explicit cognition
- Implicit cognition
- Implicit personality theories

Attribution

Explaining the behavior of others can be affected by:
- Fundamental attribution error
- Blaming the victim
- Hindsight bias
- Self-serving bias
- Just-world hypothesis

Attitudes

- A learned tendency to evaluate an object, person, or issue in a particular way
- Can have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components
- Although attitudes typically influence behavior, sometimes behavior influences our attitudes.

When behavior conflicts with attitudes, cognitive dissonance may result.

Prejudice

A negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific group

Stereotypes:
- Form of social categorization in which characteristics are attributed to all members of a group
- Fostered by in-group and out-group thinking, and the out-group homogeneity effect.
- In-group bias occurs when we attribute positive qualities to members of our own group.
- Implicit attitudes are evaluations that are automatic and unintentional.

Muzafar Sherif (1906–1988): Robbers Cave experiment; intergroup conflict can be decreased when groups engage in a cooperative effort.
When you adjust your opinions, judgments, or behavior in response to real or imagined group pressure, normative social influence, or informational social influence

**Solomon Asch** (1907–1996)
Showed that people will conform to the majority opinion even when they know it is objectively wrong

**Stanley Milgram** (1933–1984)
Studied obedience of destructive orders

Factors influencing obedience:
- Mental framework favoring obedience
- Situation or context
- Escalation of the task
- Experimenter’s behavior
- Separation from victim
- Presence of others who resist

**Philip Zimbardo** (b. 1933)
Conducted study known as the Stanford Prison Experiment

**Bibb Latané** (b. 1937) and **John Darley** (b. 1938)
Studied the factors that influence whether people will help a stranger.

Factors increasing helping behavior:
- “Feel good, do good” effect
- Guilt
- Seeing others help
- Help perceived as deserved
- Knowing how to help
- Relationship
- Dangerous situation

Factors decreasing helping behavior:
- The bystander effect and diffusion of responsibility
- Big city or small town
- Ambiguous situations
- Personal costs outweigh benefits

**Social Influence**
Social psychology research area that investigates how our behavior is affected by situational factors and other people

**Conformity**
When you adjust your opinions, judgments, or behavior in response to real or imagined group pressure, normative social influence, or informational social influence

**Obedience**
Performing a behavior in response to a direct command by an authority figure or person of higher status

**Prosocial behavior:**
behavior that helps others

**Altruism:** Helping behavior with no expectation of personal gain or benefit

**Aggression:**
Verbal or physical behavior intended to cause harm to others

**Biological influences:**
- Genes and brain structure
- Biochemical influence

**Psychological influences:**
- Learning
- Frustration

**Gender and cultural influences:**
- More common in males
- Culture of honor
- Income inequality