16.1. The Nature of Social Psychology

A. Social psychology, according to Gordon Allport, is the attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.

B. Social psychologists thus deal with cognitions, affects (emotions), and behaviors.

16.2. Social Cognition

Social cognition refers to how we perceive and interpret information from ourselves (intrapersonal world) and others (interpersonal world).

A. Cognitive-consistency theory

1. People attempt to achieve cognitive consistency—that is, a match between their cognitions (thoughts) and their behavior.

2. Justification of effort is a key to attaining cognitive consistency. We attempt to explain why we put effort into what we did, especially when what we did does not make good sense to us.

3. Leon Festinger and Merrill Carlsmith suggested that when our behavior does not correspond to our beliefs, we experience cognitive dissonance—intellectual discomfort and confusion as a result of having acted in a way that does not jibe well with our beliefs about how things ought to be.

4. You are most likely to experience cognitive dissonance when (a) you have freely chosen the action that causes the dissonance; (b) you have firmly committed yourself to that behavior, and it is irrevocable; and (c) your behavior has significant consequences for other people. For example, suppose that a couple is very unhappily married, that there are children from the marriage, and that both members devoutly believe that divorce is morally wrong, especially when children are involved. Such a situation is likely to cause maximal dissonance because all three of the above factors are operative.

5. In contrast, you are less likely to experience cognitive dissonance if you are forced into an action, if you still have the option of not continuing to perform the action, or if your behavior has consequences for no one but yourself. Someone who is coerced into a marriage, who has no children to think about, and who has no prior beliefs ruling out divorce is likely to experience comparatively dissonance (than in the case above) if he or she decides to file for divorce.
B. Self-perception theory

1. Daryl Bem proposed that whereas most of us would say that our behavior is caused by our beliefs, exactly the opposite is true. Bem’s self-perception theory states that when we are not sure of what we believe, we infer our beliefs from our behavior. In other words, we perceive our actions much as an outside observer would, and we thereby draw conclusions about ourselves, based on our actions.

2. Self-perception theory can be used to explain much of the same behavior that cognitive-dissonance theory has been used to explain. Consider, for example, the woman who has always been against divorce, but now finds herself filing for divorce. According to cognitive-dissonance theory, this woman will experience dissonance, which may lead her to reconsider her views on divorce. According to self-perception theory, the individual will also reconsider her views on divorce, but not because of dissonance, but rather because her actions lead her to the conclusion that she must not be so opposed to divorce, after all, as she is herself filing for it.

C. An integration between cognitive-dissonance and self-perception theories

1. Research by Russell Fazio, Mark Zanna, and Joel Cooper has suggested that people sometimes use cognitive-dissonance mechanisms and other times use self-perception mechanisms.

2. Dissonance theory applies better when people behave in ways that do not follow at all well from their usual beliefs or attitudes. If you have always been a staunch Democrat, but a friend convinces you to attend meetings of a Republican policy group, whose views you then find persuasive, your lack of cognitive consistency might be a job for dissonance theory. Thus, dissonance theory seems better to explain attitude change.

3. Self-perception theory applies better when people behave in ways that are only slightly discrepant from their normal patterns, particularly when the attitudes are vague, uncertain, and not fully formed. If you think that you do not like brussel sprouts, although you have never really tried them, but you find yourself happily munching them one night at dinner, self-perception theory might help you to achieve cognitive consistency. Thus, self-perception theory seems better to explain attitude formation.

D. Attribution theory

1. Attribution occurs when we try to explain the causes of behavior. Attribution theory deals with how people go about explaining the causes of behavior. Fritz Heider pointed out that people make two basic kinds of attributions. Personal attributions (also called dispositional attributions) are based on internal factors in a person (“My stupidity got me into this jam”). Situational attributions are based on factors external to a person, such as settings, events, or other people (“It was sheer bad luck that got me into this jam”). Several attribution heuristics and biases have been identified.

2. Social desirability, identified by Edward Jones and others, refers to our tendency to give undeservedly heavy weight to socially undesirable behaviors. Thus, if a person smells bad, no other positive trait may compensate for the negative impression we have on account of the person’s bad smell.

3. The fundamental attribution error, identified by Lee Ross, refers to our tendency to overemphasize internal causes and personal responsibility and to de-emphasize external causes and situational influences when observing the behavior of other people. For example, if another person mistreats friends, we are more likely to attribute the person’s behavior to something about the person’s bad nature than to something about the situation.

4. The actor–observer effect, noted by Edward Jones and Richard Nisbett, expands on the notion of the fundamental attribution error. In particular, this effect refers to our tendency not only to attribute the actions of others to stable internal attributes of these people, but also to attribute our own actions to external situational factors. Thus, if others mistreat friends, they are rotten people; if we mistreat friends, it is because we are under pressure, or the friends are getting what they deserve, or because we have no choice in the situation.
5. **Self-serving biases** refer to our tendency to be generous when interpreting our own actions. A man with this bias is likely to attribute his own successes to his own outstanding characteristics. Others, however, are not so generously evaluated. The self-serving bias explains how the divorce rate could approach 50% in the United States, and yet people could think that this figure applies to others, but not to themselves.

6. **Self-handicapping**, studied by David Berglas, refers to actions people take to sabotage their own performance so that they will have an excuse in case of failure. For example, a student might not make the time to study for a test, but when he then does badly on it, he might attribute the failure to not having the time to study.

7. **Confirmation bias** is our tendency to find ways to confirm our already existing beliefs, rather than to seek ways in which to refute those existing beliefs. For example, if we are opposed to abortion, we are likely to seek evidence supporting this view, whereas if we favor freedom of choice regarding abortion, then we are likely to see evidence supporting this position. Confirmation bias can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, whereby things become true because we believe them to be true. For example, having low expectations for someone may lead the person to act in ways to fulfill those expectations.

8. **Person-positivity bias** is our tendency to evaluate individuals more positively than we evaluate groups, including the groups to which those individuals belong. Thus, we may have a prejudice against a certain group, but find that it applies to the group rather than to individual members of the group.

9. The **primacy effect** refers to the power of first impressions. We count first impressions more than we should, given their overall importance to judgments we make about others.

**E. Impression formation**

1. The study of impression formation deals with how we draw inferences about other people, based on the information that we obtain about them, both directly and indirectly.

2. One model of impression formation was proposed by Solomon Asch, who suggested that we tend to interpret impressions of others in terms of central traits, which are attributes that organize the way other attributes are interpreted. For example, if we greatly value intelligence in a person, other attributes may be organized in terms of our impression of another person’s intelligence.

**16.3. Attitudes and Attitude Change**

**A. What are attitudes and why do we have them?**

An **attitude** is a learned, stable, and relatively enduring evaluation of a person, object, or idea that can affect an individual’s behavior.

1. From this viewpoint, attitudes are learned rather than inborn, are relatively stable and enduring, and are evaluative.

2. Daniel Katz has suggested that attitudes (a) help us get what we want; (b) help us avoid what we do not want; (c) help us understand and integrate complex sources of information; and (d) reflect our deeply held values.

3. Attitudes can be learned in at least three ways: (a) through classical conditioning, when an object or concept toward which we originally have no particular attitude is paired with an object or concept toward which we do have a particular attitude; (b) through operant conditioning, whereby we are rewarded for certain attitudes, but not for others; and (c) through social learning, whereby we observe attitudes or results of attitudes in others and internalize what we observe.

**B. How attitudes change**

According to Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, there are at least two main routes through which we may be persuaded to develop or change attitudes.

1. The **central route** to persuasion emphasizes thoughtful arguments related to the issue about which the attitude is being formed or changed.
2. The **peripheral route** to persuasion involves tangential features of the message, such as the attractiveness of the person trying to persuade us, or the attractiveness of the way in which this person presents his or her message.

### C. Persuasiveness of Messages

1. On average, messages are no more effective whether they present one or both sides of an argument. However, if people hear both sides of an argument, they are later more resistant to change in attitude if exposed to arguments from the side opposing the attitude they have formed.

2. Robert Zajone has suggested that sheer repetition, sometimes called the **mere exposure effect**, can result in attitude change. We are more likely to be persuaded when we hear the same message again and again.

3. Our attitudes are more likely to change if a persuasive source is higher rather than lower in **credibility**.

4. We are also more likely to change our attitudes if the persuader is liked by us, an effect sometimes called the **likability effect**.

### D. Attitudes and Behavior

1. Attitudes are linked to behavior, but not strongly: Behavior may or may not reflect our attitudes.

2. We are more likely to change our behavior to match an attitude to the extent that the attitude is (a) strong, (b) based on a relatively large amount of information and experience, (c) specific, and (d) allowed to express itself in a variety of situations.

### 16.4. Liking, Loving, and Interpersonal Attraction

#### A. Theories of liking and interpersonal attraction

1. According to **reinforcement theory**, we are more likely to like someone who rewards us or in whose company we experience rewards. When we experience rewards in the presence of a person, that person becomes a **secondary reinforcer**.

2. **Equity theory** claims that people will be more attracted to those with whom they have an equitable (i.e., fair) relationship. In other words, we are attracted to people who take from us in proportion to what they give us. Elaine Hatfield and her colleagues have pointed out some implications of this view, namely, that (a) it is important that both members of a couple feel roughly equally rewarded; (b) that when one partner feels wronged by the other, equity must be established as quickly as possible; (c) that both partners feel that equity can, in fact, be restored.

3. **Balance theory** suggests that we try to maintain consistency in our likes and dislikes of others. Fritz Heider suggested that, in general, if we like a given individual, B, and B likes C, then our relationships will be in balance if we also like C. If we do not like C, however, then we will be out of balance, and will be likely either belatedly to start liking C, or to start not liking B.

#### B. Theories of love

1. John Lee has proposed a theory of **styles of love**. He suggests six styles: (a) *eros*, which involves high valuing of physical appearance and an intense, passionate relationship; (b) *ludus*, which involves playfulness, and sometimes manipulation and relationships with many partners; (c) *storge*, involving a slowly developing relationship, a strong friendship, and a sense of lasting commitment; (d) *agape*, involving altruism and sacrifice; (e) *pragma*, involving the fulfillment of practical needs; and (f) *mania*, involving demandingness, possessiveness, and the need for control.

2. Sigmund Freud suggested that love is largely sexuality that has been made socially acceptable. According to Freud, people want sexual relations more frequently and with more partners than society will allow, so that they need to **sublimate** (render societally acceptable) their sexual desires.

3. According to Elaine Hatfield and Ellen Berscheid's **two-component cognitive-labeling theory**, we feel passion toward a person when we are emotionally and physically aroused and when we interpret that arousal as love.
4. Evolutionary theorists have suggested that love serves an adaptive function, forming the initial basis that eventually leads to procreation.

5. Philip Shaver and Cynthia Hazan have suggested that people have three attachment styles in their love relationships. Secure lovers find it relatively easy to get close to others. They are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them. Avoidant lovers are uncomfortable being close to others. They find it difficult to trust others and to allow themselves to depend on others. They get nervous when anyone gets too close, and they often find that their partners in love want to become more intimate than they find comfortable. Anxious–ambivalent lovers find that their potential or actual partners in love are reluctant to get as close as the anxious–ambivalent lover would like. One's adult attachment style is often a reflection of the attachment style one showed in infancy.

6. Robert Sternberg has proposed a triangular theory of love, according to which there are three basic components of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Various combinations of these three components yield various types of love. In particular, (a) the lack of all three leads to nonlove; (b) intimacy alone leads to liking (friendship); (c) passion alone leads to infatuation; (d) commitment alone leads to empty love; (e) intimacy plus passion (without commitment) lead to romantic love; (f) intimacy plus commitment (without passion) lead to companionate love; (g) passion plus commitment (without intimacy) lead to fatuous love; and (h) intimacy, passion, and commitment lead to consummate love.

C. Variables underlying attraction

1. A first variable underlying attraction is proximity, that is, geographic nearness. To be attracted to people, we first have to meet them, and we are more likely to meet them if we live near them.

2. A second variable underlying attraction is physical appeal. We tend to be attracted to people whom we find physically appealing.

3. A third variable is similarity. We tend to be more attracted to people who are, on average, more like ourselves.

D. Verbal communication

1. According to the theory of social penetration, as we become more deeply involved with another person, our conversation expands both in terms of breadth and in terms of depth.

2. Deborah Tannen has pointed out that men and women often have very different styles of communication. Men tend to see the world as forming a hierarchical social order, try to preserve their independence, and try to avoid failure. Women are more likely to seek to establish connections between people, to give support and confirmation to each other, and to seek to reach consensus through communication.

16.5. Nonverbal Communication

A. Much of our communication with other people is nonverbal—through eye contact, gestures, and body language in general.

B. The study of interpersonal distance (and its opposite, proximity) is called proxemics.

C. Different cultures seek to establish different amounts of personal space, that is, the distance between two people in conversation or who are otherwise interacting. For example, Scandinavians and Japanese expect more distance than do South Americans.

**Summary**

1. Social psychologists seek to understand and explain how the presence of others (actual, imagined, or implied) affects the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the individual.

2. Social cognition refers to ways in which we perceive and interpret information from others and ourselves.
3. **Cognitive dissonance**—a feeling of intellectual discomfort—can result when a person’s behavior and cognitions do not mesh. To ease this discomfort, people often engage in **justification of effort**, trying to explain to themselves as well as others why they have done what they have done.

4. **Self-perception theory** suggests that we often infer our attitudes from our behavior.

5. **Attribution theory** deals with how we go about explaining the causes of behavior—why we do what we do, and why others act as they do.

6. The **fundamental attribution error** leads us to overemphasize internal rather than external causes when we view the behavior of others. According to the **actor–observer effect**, we overemphasize internal causes when evaluating the behavior of others, but tend to overemphasize external, situational causes when evaluating our own behavior.

7. Because of **confirmation bias**, we often seek to verify rather than to disconfirm beliefs we already have. This bias can lead to **self-fulfilling prophecies**, whereby what we believe becomes true simply by virtue of our belief in it.

8. The **person-positivity bias** results in our evaluating individuals more favorably than we do groups.

9. In forming impressions of others, we are often susceptible to a **primacy effect**, whereby we give more weight to what we learn earlier than to what we learn later.

10. **Attitudes** are learned, stable, relatively lasting evaluations of people, ideas, and things.

11. Attitudes serve a number of functions, such as helping us get what we want and avoid what we do not want.

12. In attempting to change the attitudes of others, the characteristics of the message, the source, and the recipient of the message all affect how likely attitudes are to change.

13. We tend to like people who are similar to ourselves. We are also more likely to feel attraction toward people who are physically appealing and who are proximal to us.

14. A number of theories of love have been proposed. Among these theories are the **two-component cognitive-labeling theory**, evolutionary theory, and the **triangular theory of love**.

15. Successful communication is important to relationships. Men and women seem to like to communicate in somewhat different ways, with men more emphasizing status hierarchies and women more emphasizing closeness and consensus.

16. Nonverbal communication can be as important as verbal communication. **Eye contact** and **personal space** are two aspects of nonverbal communication.

### Key Terms

- actor–observer effect
- attachment style
- attitude
- attribution
- attribution theory
- balance theory
- central route
- central traits
- cognitive consistency
- cognitive dissonance
- confirmation bias
- credibility
- dispositional attribution
- equity theory
- fundamental attribution error
- impression formation
- justification of effort
- likability effect
- mere exposure effect
- peripheral route
- personal attribution
- personal space
- person-positivity bias
- primacy effect
- proxemics
- proximity
- reinforcement theory
- secondary reinforcer
- self-fulfilling prophecy
- self-handicapping
- self-perception theory
- self-serving bias
- situational attribution
- social cognition
- social desirability
- social penetration
- social psychology
- style of love
- triangular theory of love
- two-component cognitive-labeling theory
Solved Problems

A. Select the best response option from among the four that are given.

1. Jenny is eating cheesecake and feels a sense of intellectual discomfort after just declaring to her friend that she is on a diet. The condition invoked by this situation is referred to as
   A. justification of effort.
   B. cognitive dissonance.
   C. cognitive consistency.
   D. rationalization.

2. You’ve gone out to lunch with your new co-worker for the past three days. Which theory would best explain why you have come to the conclusion that you do, in fact, like him?
   A. cognitive-dissonance theory
   B. attribution theory
   C. self-perception theory
   D. self-observational theory

3. A man cuts in front of you in the line at the post office. An explanation involving a fundamental attribution error would be that the man
   A. is a self-centered person lacking concern for others.
   B. is in a hurry to catch his train.
   C. was previously in line, then had to leave the line to pick up something he forgot.
   D. is a friend of the postmaster.

4. Individuals who show confirmation bias will
   A. view themselves in a positive light.
   B. seek to show that the behavior of other individuals is due to dispositional factors.
   C. bias their perceptions in favor of more positive evaluations of individuals over groups.
   D. seek to confirm their preexisting views.

5. The mere exposure effect refers to
   A. how message repetition can inoculate individuals against attitudinal change.
   B. the adverse effects of message saturation.
   C. the effect of repeating a message on attitudinal change.
   D. the effects that exposure to a persuasive source can have on attitudinal change.

6. John loves going out with Samantha because she often compliments and praises him for his accomplishments. On the basis of the above description, John’s feelings toward Samantha are best described by which theory of interpersonal attraction?
   A. equity theory
   B. balance theory
   C. arousal theory
   D. reinforcement theory

7. Robert Sternberg’s triangular theory of love postulates that
   A. friendship has nothing to do with love.
   B. companionate love is made up of equal amounts of intimacy, passion, and commitment.
   C. different balances of the three components of love produce seven different types of love.
   D. a loving relationship cannot exist on the basis of one of the three components alone.

8. One variable that is not typically cited as a factor underlying interpersonal attraction is
   A. attitudinal similarity.
   B. physical attraction.
   C. proximity.
   D. prejudice in favor of an individual but against the individual’s group.
B. Answer each of the following questions with the appropriate word or phrase.

9. A _______ strategy refers to efforts to sabotage one’s own work so as to have an excuse for failure.

10. _______ refers to how we perceive and interpret information about ourselves and other people.

11. Fritz Heider has differentiated between _______ and _______ attributions in people’s explanatory styles.

12. “I was pushed, he jumped” is a statement that shows the _______.

13. An attributional bias that refers to our tendency to evaluate an individual more positively than we evaluate the group to which the individual belongs is referred to as _______.

14. The _______ of liking holds that we try to maintain consistency in whom we like, and in whom our friends like.

15. Solomon Asch has described how _______ play a role in impression formation with regard to attributes of various individuals.

16. Richard Petty and John Cacioppo have described the _______ to persuasion as one involving thoughtful arguments related to attitudes being changed or formed.

17. To experience love, according to the _______, one needs to feel passion as well as to label that passion as love.

18. Central to Sigmund Freud’s theory of love is _______, whereby sexual drives are redirected in socially acceptable ways.

19. _______ lovers find that their partners do not get as close to them as they would like.

20. _______ refers to geographic nearness.

C. Answer T (true) or F (false) to each of the following statements.

21. Self-perception theory holds that we infer our beliefs from our behavior.

22. The bombing of a federal office building in Oklahoma City probably served to dispel many people’s self-serving biases about their immunity to terrorism.

23. If one remembers one’s most recent encounter with a person, and biases his or her perceptions of that person by this encounter, the phenomenon is referred to as the primacy effect.

24. Attitudes are learned, stable, and relatively enduring.

25. Researchers have shown that it is important to present both sides of an argument in order for attitude change to occur.

26. Underlying any behavior is an attitudinal component.

27. Research has shown that we are more likely to change our attitudes if we like the persuader.

28. Balance theory states that partners will be attracted to one another when both partners feel that there is a similarity in the amount of give and take that is being exchanged in the relationship.

29. John Lee has pioneered a unidimensional approach to love, whereby he has identified a single love style common to the majority of cultures.
30. Philip Shaver and Cynthia Hazan have suggested that the attachment style we had to our primary care-giver will influence our later style of interaction with our love partners.

31. Deborah Tannen has suggested that in communication, men strive to preserve their independence, whereas women try to give support and confirmation to each other.

**Answer Key**

1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. D; 5. C; 6. D; 7. C; 8. D; 9. self-handicapping; 10. Social cognition; 11. personal, situational; 12. actor–observer effect; 13. person-positivity bias; 14. balance theory; 15. central traits; 16. central route; 17. two-component cognitive-labeling theory; 18. sublimation; 19. Anxious–ambivalent; 20. Proximity; 21. T; 22. T; 23. F (the primacy effect refers to the power of the first impression, and how this impression colors subsequent ones); 24. T; 25. F (research has shown that two-sided messages are no more effective, on average, than are one-sided arguments in eliciting attitudinal change); 26. F (some behaviors do not reflect attitudes and may even be contrary to attitudes); 27. T; 28. F (this is a description of the equity theory of interpersonal attraction); 29. F (John Lee suggests six styles of love, all of which differ in their behavioral manifestations); 30. T; 31. T.