17 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY:
INTERPERSONAL AND
GROUP PERSPECTIVES

THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT

- Groups
- Conformity, Compliance, and Obedience
- Prosocial Behavior
- Antisocial Behavior

17.1. Groups

A. A group is a collection of individuals who interact with each other.

B. A group is sometimes distinguished from a collective, a set of people engaged in common activity but with minimal direct interaction.

C. According to social-facilitation theory, having other people around while you are performing a task can improve your performance, an effect called social facilitation. When having other people around impedes performance, it is referred to as social inhibition.

1). Work by Robert Zajonc suggests that having other people present is arousing, and that arousal facilitates well-learned responses but inhibits newly or poorly learned responses.

2). An alternative to Zajonc's theory is distraction-conflict theory, according to which the effect of other people on performance is not due to their mere presence, but to the distraction these people cause.

D. Sometimes, when we are working with other people, we reduce our own effort. For example, when we are playing an instrument in an orchestra, we may try less hard if others playing the same instrument have the same part and thus may cover for our not trying. The reduced effort of group members as a function of the size of a group is called social loafing.

E. When people make decisions in groups, there is a tendency for the decision to represent an exaggeration of group members' initial positions. This effect is known as group polarization.

F. When people try to resolve conflicts, there are several different orientations they may have.

1). When people have a cooperative orientation, they seek to maximize both their own outcomes and the outcomes of others.

2). An individualistic orientation leads people to seek only to maximize their own outcomes.

3). When people have a competitive orientation, they seek to maximize their own outcomes at the expense of others.

4). An altruistic orientation leads people to maximize only the outcomes of others.

G. Groupthink, according to Irving Janis, occurs when members of a group are so concerned with unanimity that they do not realistically appraise alternative courses of action. The result of groupthink is defective decision making.

1). Janis suggested three conditions that lead to groupthink: (a) an isolated, cohesive, and homogeneous group empowered to make decisions; (b) the absence of objective and impartial leadership, either within the group or outside of it; and (c) high levels of stress impinging on the group decision-making process.
2). Janis also suggested six symptoms of groupthink: (a) closed-mindedness—the group is not open to a variety of alternative conceptualizations; (b) rationalization—the group goes to great lengths to justify both the process and the product of its decision making, distorting reality where necessary in order to accomplish this justification; (c) squelching of dissent—those who do not agree are ignored, criticized, or even ostracized; (d) formation of a “mindguard” for the group—one person who appoints him- or herself as the keeper of the group norm and who makes sure that people stay in line; (e) feelings of invulnerability—the group believes that it must be right, given the intelligence of and the information available to group members; and (f) feelings of unanimity—the group members feel that all those in the group are unanimous in sharing the opinions expressed by the group.

17.2. Conformity, Compliance, and Obedience

A. Conformity refers to a person’s modification of behavior to make it consistent with the norms of the group.

1). In a famous set of experiments published in the 1950s, Solomon Asch found that many people will conform to a group judgment regarding which of several black lines is the same length as another black line, even when they know that they are saying is incorrect. Asch found that nonconforming group members were generally not liked by other members of the group.

2). Several factors affect level of conformity. One factor is group size: People most conform when the size of the group is about three or four members. A second factor is group cohesiveness, that is, the extent to which the members feel very much a part of the group and are highly attracted to it. Conformity increases with group cohesion. A third factor is gender as it interacts with the topic under consideration. Females tend to conform more to a majority view on topics that are stereotypically male, whereas males tend to conform more on topics that are stereotypically female. A fourth factor is social status. Group members who are rated as “average” in social desirability within a group are more likely to conform than are those who are rated as high or low in desirability. A fifth factor is culture. People in various cultures are differentially conforming. The last variable is the appearance of unanimity. Conformity is less likely when there is already even a single dissenter in a group.

B. Compliance refers to a person’s yielding to a request of another person or group. There are several techniques that can be used to gain compliance, which have been studied by Robert Cialdini.

1). Justification refers to your justifying a request. Even when the justification is weak, you will gain compliance more readily than if you simply make the request but do not justify it.

2). Reciprocity occurs when you appear to be giving your target something, so that the target is thereby obliged to give you something in return.

3). Low-ball refers to your getting the target to comply and to commit to a deal under misleadingly favorable circumstances. After obtaining the target’s commitment, you add the hidden costs or reveal the hidden drawbacks.

4). Foot-in-the-door involves your asking for compliance with a smaller request, which is designed to “soften up” the target for the big request.

5). Door-in-the-face involves making an outlandishly large request that is almost certain to be rejected, in the hope of getting the target to accede to a more reasonable but perhaps still large request.

6). That’s-not-all involves offering something at a high price, and then, before the target has a chance to respond, throwing in something else to sweeten the deal.

7). Hard-to-get involves convincing your target that whatever you are offering (or trying to get rid of) is very difficult to obtain.

C. Obedience refers to a person’s modification of behavior in response to the command of an actual or perceived authority.

1). A series of studies by Stanley Milgram showed that people are much more likely to obey authorities than virtually anyone would have believed. Subjects were told that they were participating in an experiment on learning. They were to serve as teacher, and another subject (actually, a confederate of the experimenter)
was assigned to be the learner. The subject was told to administer a shock to the learner every time he made a mistake in learning. Each shock was to be of greater intensity than the previous one. Subjects were willing to shock the learner more often and at greater intensity than had been expected. Actually, the shocks that the learner received were fake, but the subject did not know this fact.

2). Milgram interpreted his results as suggesting (although certainly not conclusively) that the kind of blind obedience to authority that had occurred in Nazi Germany could happen anywhere.

17.3. Prosocial Behavior

A. Prosocial behavior is consistent with, or even furthers, the common good.

B. In 1964, Kitty Genovese, a young woman in New York City, returned home from a night job at 3:00 in the morning. Before she reached her home, she was repeatedly attacked over a period of about a half hour by a man who eventually killed her. Thirty-eight people living in her apartment complex in Queens heard her cries and screams as she was attacked, and yet none either came to her aid or called the police.

1). This event, among others, led to research by Bibb Latane and John Darley on the bystander effect, an effect in which the presence of other people inhibits helping behavior.

2). This effect occurs in a variety of different situations. Each person typically experiences a diffusion of responsibility, so that the presence of others leads each person to feel less responsible personally for dealing with a crisis that has arisen.

3). Latane and Darley found that for intervention to occur, a person had to pass through five stages: (a) notice the emergency, (b) define it as an emergency, (c) decide to take responsibility, (d) decide on a way to help, and (e) implement the chosen way to help. Failure in the execution of any of these steps will result in the person’s not taking helping action.

C. A number of factors influence helping behavior across different kinds of situations, either increasing or decreasing the probability of intervention.

1). Characteristics of the victims: Similarity to the bystander (increase), relationships to bystander (probably increase), bleeding or bloody victim (decrease), recognizability of victim as being a member of a stigmatized group (decrease)

2). Characteristics of the situation: Increase in the number of bystanders (decrease), increased time pressures on bystander (decrease)

3). Characteristics of the bystander: Similarity to victim (increase), relationship to victim (probably increase), negative responses to characteristics of the victim (decrease), empathy (increase), emotionality (probably increase), knowledge of how to help the victim (increase), dedication to a life of serving others (no effect), recently has given thought to helping behavior (no effect), being in a good mood (increase)

D. Altruism is selfless sacrifice. There are disagreements among social psychologists as to the causes of altruism. Some social psychologists believe that altruists help others genuinely to be helpful. Other social psychologists believe that altruists help others in order to make themselves feel better.

17.4. Antisocial Behavior

A. Antisocial behavior is behavior that is harmful to society or to its members.

B. Prejudice is an unfavorable attitude directed toward other groups of people, based on insufficient or incorrect evidence about these groups.

1). Prejudice is directed toward a group rather than toward individuals.

2). A negative attitude is not the same as prejudice. One may have a negative attitude for justifiable cause.

3). One source of prejudice is illusory correlation, a heuristic that can lead us to be more likely to notice instances of unusual behavior in relation to a minority population than we are to notice common behaviors in members of a minority population or unusual behaviors in a majority population.
4). Several theories of prejudice have been proposed. According to realistic-conflict theory, prejudice is caused by competition among groups for valuable but scarce resources. Social-identity theory suggests that people have prejudices in order to increase their self-esteem.

5). Several theories have also been proposed as to how to reduce prejudice. According to the contact hypothesis, direct contact between groups that have prejudicial attitudes toward each other will decrease prejudice. It appears, however, that for contact to work, (a) the two interacting groups must be of equal status; (b) the contact must involve personal interactions between members of the two groups; (c) the groups need to engage in cooperative activities; and (d) the social norms must favor reduction of prejudice.

C. Social categorization is the human tendency to sort things and people into groups, based on perceived common attributes.

1). One type of social categorization is a stereotype, which is a prototype for people in a category that usually does not do justice to the people in their full individuality.

2). Outgroup homogeneity bias refers to our tendency to view members of an outgroup (socially unfavored group) as all being more or less alike.

D. Aggression is behavior directed against another person that is intended to cause harm or injury.

1). Hostile aggression is emotional and usually is impulsive, often provoked by feelings of pain or distress.

2). Instrumental aggression is used to obtain something we want.

3). Several theories have been proposed as to why people experience aggression. One theory is that it is in our biological nature as a species to experience aggression. A second theory is that we become aggressive as a result of social learning—by watching others be aggressive. In fact, there is good evidence that exposure to aggressive role models leads to aggression, whether through television, movies, or direct experience.

4). Furthermore, there is evidence that male aggression toward females increases after males watch pornographic films displaying sexual violence.

5). Several factors can contribute to aggression. A first factor is aggression itself: Aggression often leads to more of the same. A second factor is pain. Hostile aggression is often provoked by feelings of pain. A third factor is discomfort. A fourth factor is frustration.

6). Several techniques can be used to reduce aggression. These techniques include observing nonaggressive role models, generating responses that are incompatible with aggression (such as humor), and using cognitive strategies to control aggression (such as stopping to think before acting aggressively).

E. Deindividuation occurs when there is a loss of a sense of individual identity, usually in the context of a crowd, resulting in the reduction of constraints against unacceptable behavior.

1). Philip Zimbardo did an experiment in the basement of the Stanford University Psychology Department, in which college students were randomly assigned to play the roles of either prisoners or guards. Within short order, the two groups were acting so much like their roles that the experiment had to be discontinued for the students’ own protection.

2). The Zimbardo study suggests that people in a prison situation deindividuate quickly, so that almost without regard to their personality attributes, the situation leads them to behave in ways that reflect the roles they are in.

Summary

1. A group is a collection of individuals who interact with each other.

2. Social-facilitation theory and distraction-conflict theory offer explanations for how the presence of others affects our performance.

3. Social loafing occurs in groups when people try less hard as a result of being in a group.
4. Groups often exhibit **polarization**, whereby they choose a more extreme position than that typically represented by the individual members.

5. **Groupthink** occurs when a closely knit group cares more about consensus than about reaching an optimal solution to a problem.

6. **Conformity** refers to a person's modification of behavior in response to a request by other persons.

7. Factors affecting conformity include group size, cohesiveness of the group, gender, social status, culture, and the appearance of unanimity.

8. **Compliance** refers to a person's yielding to a request.

9. Compliance can be encouraged through techniques such as justification, reciprocity, low-ball, foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, that’s-not-all, and hard-to-get.

10. **Obedience** refers to a person's modification of behavior in response to the command of an actual or perceived authority.

11. The Milgram experiments showed that people are much more likely to obey authority than almost anyone would have expected.

12. The **bystander effect** refers to an effect whereby the presence of others discourages helping behavior.

13. **Altruism** is selfless sacrifice.

14. **Prejudice** is based on faulty evidence, which in turn often is based on **social categorization** and **stereotypes**. Several theories of prejudice have been proposed.

15. **Aggression** is behavior directed against another person that is intended to cause harm or injury. It may be hostile or instrumental.

16. **Deindividuation** occurs when people behave in unacceptable ways as a result of their losing their individual identities, usually in a crowd.

### Key Terms

- aggression
- altruism
- antisocial behavior
- bystander effect
- compliance
- conformity
- contact hypothesis
- deindividuation
- diffusion of responsibility
- distraction-conflict theory
- door-in-the-face
- foot-in-the-door
- group
- group polarization
- groupthink
- hard-to-get
- hostile aggression
- illusory correlation
- instrumental aggression
- justification
- low-ball
- obedience
- outgroup homogeneity bias
- prejudice
- prosocial behavior
- realistic conflict theory
- reciprocity
- social categorization
- social facilitation
- social facilitation theory
- social identity theory
- social inhibition
- social loafing
- stereotype
- that’s-not-all

### Solved Problems

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

1. **Group polarization** is an effect whereby
   A. extreme opinions in a group become moderate with increased group interaction.
   B. group members' moderate positions become polarized with increased group interaction.
   C. group decisions represent an exaggeration of group members' initial positions.
   D. the group members' main concern is to maintain unanimity and group cohesion.
2. Groupthink is *unlikely* to occur when which of the following factors is present?
   A. There is a high degree of stress in the decision-making process.
   B. There are clear objectives in the decision-making process.
   C. The group is homogeneous in composition.
   D. The group is ideologically isolated.

3. At the request of her husband Bill, Valerie picks up a loaf of bread on her way home from work. Valerie’s action shows
   A. compliance.
   B. obedience.
   C. conformity.
   D. cooperation.

4. The bystander effect occurs when
   A. the helping individual is in a good mood.
   B. the presence of other people inhibits helping behavior.
   C. the presence of other people facilitates helping behavior.
   D. an individual feels other people will help if he or she does.

5. If John views all Chinese as physically, culturally, and behaviorally alike, he is showing
   A. illusory correlation.
   B. discriminatory cognitive bias.
   C. the all-the-same rule.
   D. outgroup homogeneity bias.

6. A toddler who forcibly takes away the toy of another screaming toddler is showing
   A. instrumental aggression.
   B. hostile aggression.
   C. displaced aggression.
   D. secondary aggression.

7. One factor not typically cited as a causal factor in eliciting aggressive behavior is
   A. exposure to aggressive role models.
   B. a genetic predisposition to experience aggression.
   C. frustration.
   D. inaccessible everyday outlets for aggressive behavior.

B. Answer each of the following questions with the appropriate word or phrase.

8. An effect called ______ can account for the fact that Tonya always plays her best tennis when the largest groups are present.

9. The ______ holds that the distraction of others takes our attention away from our activities, which subsequently affects our performance.

10. An orientation in decision-making that seeks to optimize personal gain at the expense of others is termed a ______ one.

11. If group members go to great lengths to prove that their untenable positions and decision-making are correct, accurate, and justifiable, they are showing ______.

12. One tactic for gaining compliance, termed ______, involves the addition of unexpected costs or drawbacks that are revealed only after the commitment of the individual is obtained.

13. ______ is demonstrated by selfless sacrifice.

14. ______ is an unfavorable attitude directed toward members of a group, based on insufficient or incorrect evidence.
15. One theory of how to reduce prejudicial attitudes among group members, called the ________, holds that you need to have group members interact with one another and work cooperatively.

16. One theory on the origin of prejudice, called the ________, holds that prejudicial attitudes result from efforts of individuals to increase their self-esteem.

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

17. A collective is a group of individuals who have frequent interactions with one other.

18. Social loafing increases as a function of group size.

19. Solomon Asch found that one result of group conformity is that the dissenting group members were generally not well liked by the rest of the group.

20. According to Janis, one symptom of groupthink is that group members actively pursue opinions contrary to their own beliefs because they feel so strongly that other opinions may also be correct and rational.

21. The modification of behavior in order to bring the behavior in line with the norms of the social group is called compliance.

22. Group members who are rated as moderate in social status are more likely to conform than are those members who are rated as either low or high in social status.

23. A foot-in-the-door tactic involves starting with an extremely large request, and then moving to a much smaller request in the hope that the smaller second request will seem more appealing.

24. In a large crowd, individuals may be less likely to help a distressed individual because they believe someone else will help the distressed person. This effect is referred to as the diffusion of responsibility.

25. Helping behavior is less likely to occur if the bystander feels a degree of similarity to the victim.

26. If one has negative feelings about members of a racial group and actively avoids any contact with members of that group, he or she is showing prejudice.

27. Forming stereotypes is an effect of social categorization.

28. Zimbardo’s prison study suggests that individuals have difficulty accommodating to different roles when placed under extreme duress.

**Answer Key**

1. C; 2. B; 3. A; 4. B; 5. D; 6. A; 7. D; 8. social facilitation; 9. distraction-conflict theory; 10. competitive; 11. rationalization; 12. low-balling; 13. Altruism; 14. Prejudice; 15. contact hypothesis; 16. social-identity theory; 17. F (collectives share common activities, but members do not interact regularly); 18. T; 19. T; 20. F (when groupthink is present, members are closed-minded and try to squelch contrary opinions); 21. F (this statement describes conformity, whereas compliance involves the modification of behavior as a result of a request by another person or persons); 22. T; 23. F (this statement describes the compliance technique, door-in-the-face); 24. T; 25. F (research has shown that perceived similarity between the bystander and victim facilitates helping behavior); 26. T; 27. T; 28. F (Zimbardo’s study suggests that in a short period of time, individuals can largely lose their prior identities and begin to behave in ways corresponding to the roles they are given).