

Social psychology

Social psychology examines how a person's behavior and mental processes are influenced by other people.

Social cognition

Refers to the mental process by which people perceive and react to others.

- ***The individual in a social world***

- Social comparison

When people have no objective criteria by which to judge themselves, they turn to social comparison, using others as criteria against which to judge themselves.

Categories of people that are habitually used for social comparison are known as reference groups.

- Social norms

Social norms are learned rules of behavior that tell people what they should and should not do in various situations. Norms also lead people to develop expectations about how others will act.

Reciprocity is an example of one norm with a widespread influence on everyday life.

- ***Social perception***

Social perception guides impressions of others and interpretations of the reasons for their behavior.

- First impression

First impressions are formed easily and quickly, in part because people use existing schemas when they perceive others. Often they apply a "schema-plus-correction process" (people use the schemas they already have to perceive and interpret new information).

First impressions are difficult to change because:

- people are confident of their impressions of others
- people tend to interpret new information so that is consistent with the original impression
- people tend to remember their general impression or schema better than any correction that is later added
- people often act in ways that elicit confirming information, a process known as a “self-fulfilling prophecy”
- Explaining behavior. Attribution.

Attribution is the process of explaining the causes of people’s behavior, including one’s own.

People tend to attribute behavior to causes that are either internal or external to the actor. In general, people do this by applying three criteria to the behavior:

- *Consensus* is the degree to which other people’s behavior is similar to that of the person in question
- *Consistency* is the degree to which the behavior occurs repeatedly in a particular situation
- *Distinctiveness* depends on the predictability of behavior in various situations

Example: Your father intensely dislikes your friend Ralph:

If everyone you know thinks Ralph is a twit, your father’s behavior has a high degree of consensus, and you would attribute his reaction to something external to him – probably something about Ralph. If everyone else thinks Ralph is the sweetest guy on earth, your father negative response would have low consensus, and you would probably attribute it to something about your father.

If your father sometimes warmly invites Ralph to dinner and sometimes throws him out of the house, the consistency of his behavior is low – your father’s behavior is attributable to external cause (Ralph does something impolite).

If your father is nasty to all your friends, his behavior toward Ralph has low distinctiveness; that suggests an internal cause.

Attributions are also shaped by attributional biases. In addition, people often protect themselves from admitting something threatening (especially about themselves) through unrealistic optimism, a general illusion of control, and self-handicapping strategies.

- ***Interpersonal attraction***

- Keys to attraction

Interpersonal attraction is a function of many variables:

- Physical proximity is important because it allows for familiarity.
- The situation in which people meet is important because positive or negative aspects of the situation tend to be associated with the other person.
- Characteristics of the other person are also important. Initially, attraction is strongest to those who are most physically attractive. But for long-term relationships, the matching hypothesis applies: people tend to choose others who have about the same level of physical attractiveness.
- Attraction is also greater when two people share many similar attitudes.

- The development of intimate relationships

The defining characteristic of an intimate relationship is interdependence. The development of an intimate relationship is a slow process that depends primarily on increasingly deeper and broader levels of self-disclosure. The most important components of an intimate relationship are affection and emotional expressiveness; these often lead to feelings of support, cohesiveness, and sexuality.

- Love and marriage

Sternberg's triangular theory of love suggests that it is a function of three components:

- passion
- intimacy
- commitment

Depending on the relative strengths of the three components, there are qualitatively different types of love:

- passionate love involves passion and intimacy
- companionate love is marked by a great deal of intimacy and commitment but little passion
- fatuous love is based only on passion and commitment
- consummate love it is the most complete because it includes a high level of all three components (passion, intimacy and commitment)

Marital satisfaction is greatest when self-disclosure is high in both partners. It is also important that the two people perceive the relationship as being equitable and fair. This permits trust and creates an willingness for each person to make short-term sacrifices for the long-term viability of the relationship. Finally, simple liking and respect for each other are important because they allow people to deal effectively with conflict and anger.

- ***Attitudes***

An attitude is a predisposition to respond cognitively, emotionally, or behaviorally to a particular object in a particular way.

- Components of attitudes

Most theorists agree that attitudes have three components:

- the *cognitive* component is a set of beliefs
- the *emotional* component consists of an evaluation: a like or dislike of the object of the attitude
- the *behavioral* component involves a way of acting toward the attitude object

However, the three components do not always fit together nicely, and it is difficult to predict a specific behavior from what a persons believes or feels about an object.

- Attitude formation

Attitudes are often viewed as knowledge structures that are stored in long-term memory. Some attitudes are learned through modeling by parents or peers, other through classical conditioning or operant conditioning.

Attitudes also appear to be subject to the mere exposure effect: all else being equal, people develop greater liking for a new object as they are exposed to it more often.

- Attitude change: The role of persuasive communications

Attitude change is most likely when the source of a communication is perceived as credible, trustworthy, and similar to oneself. In general, a one-sided message (only arguments) is more effective when the audience is sympathetic to the speaker's point of view, while a two-sided message (arguments and contrary arguments) is more effective when the attitude of the audience is contrary to that of the speaker.

Attitude change is also greater when the speaker states explicit conclusions.

Fear appeals can be highly effective – but only if they are not too frightening and are accompanied by specific guidelines for how to avoid the fearful consequences.

Attitude change is greatest among individuals who have moderate levels of self-esteem.

Psychological reactance can lead people to change an attitude in the direction opposite to that advocated by the speaker.