

Social Cognition



What is Social Cognition?

- **Social Psychology**
 - scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by social environment
- **Cognitive Psychology**
 - scientific study of basic mental abilities: perception, learning, memory, etc.

Social
Psychology

+ Cognitive
Psychology

= **Social Cognition!**

▪ Social Cognition

- Scientific study of how people interpret information about selves and others

Topics

- Attitudes
- Persuasion
- Prejudice
- Interpersonal Attraction & Love
- ???

Attitudes

- What are some things that people have **strong attitudes** about?
- **Where** do our attitudes come from?
- What kinds of things can lead us to **change** our attitude about something?

Attitudes

▪ Attitude

- A belief and feeling about something that leads a person to behave in certain ways

Attitudes

Attitude Formation

1. Conditioning

- Being “rewarded” by others for having a certain attitude

2. Observational Learning

- Influence of those we see around us

Attitudes

3. Cognitive Evaluation

- Based on evidence

4. Cognitive Anchors

- Our earliest attitudes are like mental “anchors” that affect how we see things

Attitudes Affect Behavior

- How can your **attitude** about something affect your **behavior**?
 - Attitudes affect behavior when...
 - when they are specifically tied
 - E.g., school vs. global warming
 - attitude is strong
 - person is aware of own attitude

Behavior Affects Attitudes

- **B. Cognitive Dissonance**
 - Leon Festinger
 - Unpleasant feeling when attitude is not consistent with behavior or another attitude
 - Change attitude to match behavior
 - Avoid dissonant information
 - pay attention to information that supports our existing views

Cognitive Dissonance

Example:
Person on a diet enters an eating contest

This causes dissonance



Cognitive Dissonance

Ways to reduce dissonance:

- Change attitude to match behavior
 - *Diets don't really work anyway*
 - *I like the way I look, regardless of my weight*
 - *Looking thin is not important*

Cognitive Dissonance

Example:
Straight A student doesn't study and gets F on test

This causes dissonance



Cognitive Dissonance

Ways to reduce dissonance:

- Change attitude to match behavior
 - *Studying wouldn't have helped*
 - *It's OK to get Fs once in while*
 - *Going to a good college isn't a big deal*

Behavior Affects Attitudes

- **A. Stanford Prison Study**
 - When people take on a role, they often adapt to the role and take on attitudes consistent with the role



Persuasion

- Definition
 - The direct attempt to **influence** or **change** other people's **attitudes**

Persuasion

- What does change mean?



Persuasion

- **Central vs Peripheral Routes**
 - **Central Route** – evidence & logical arguments
 - **Peripheral Route** – indirect; tries to link person/product/idea with something positive or negative

Changing Attitudes with Persuasion

- What affects the persuasiveness of an argument?
 - 1. The Communicator (source)**
 - Credibility
 - Expertise
 - Physical attractiveness
 - Similar to audience in age, ethnicity, etc.

Changing Attitudes with Persuasion

- 2. The Message**
 - Repeated exposure
 - Clear, convincing, logical
 - Central route
 - **Emotional appeals**
 - Based on a strong emotion, not logic
 - Especially fear



Changing Attitudes with Persuasion

- 3. The Medium (how?)**
 - TV most widespread
 - Face-to-face very effective, esp. in politics

Changing Attitudes with Persuasion

- 4. The Audience**
 - Attitude change more likely when new attitude isn't too different
 - Openness to change is related to age & education
 - Audience should find message personally important

Some Tactics

- Door-in-the-Face Technique
- Foot-in-the-Door Technique

Propaganda

- the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person
(Merriam-Webster.com)



**World War II Propaganda:
What's the Message?**



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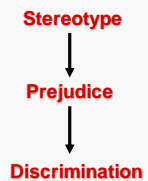
**World War II Propaganda:
What's the Message?**



Operation Iraqi Freedom Leaflets



Prejudice: Definitions



Prejudice: Definitions

- **Stereotype**
 - **COGNITIVE**
 - a belief about the personal qualities of a group of people
 - not always negative

Studying Stereotypes

- 3 levels of stereotypes in today's research
 - **Public**
 - what we say to others about a group
 - **Private**
 - what we think, but don't say to others
 - **Implicit**
 - mental associations guiding our judgments and actions without our conscious awareness

Prejudice: Definitions

- **Prejudice**
 - **EMOTIONAL**
 - a negative attitude or emotional response toward a certain group and its individual members

Prejudice: Definitions

- **Discrimination**
 - **BEHAVIORAL**
 - actively mistreating or neglecting people because of their group membership

How Stereotypes Begin

- **Ingroup**
 - Group an individual belongs to and feels loyalty for
- **Outgroup**
 - Group an individual has negative feelings toward

How Stereotypes Begin

- **Illusory Correlation**
 - When someone in an outgroup does things to confirm a negative stereotype, people tend to remember it

How Stereotypes Begin

- **Outgroup Homogeneity Effect**
 - People tend to see outgroups as being much more similar to each other than their ingroup

Causes of Prejudice

1. **Exaggerating differences**
 - Making the differences between two groups larger than they are
 - *"We can never get along with you people. We're just too different."*

Causes of Prejudice

2. **Blaming the Victim**
 - Tendency to assume that those who are worse off **deserve** it in some way
 - Can be frightening to think bad things happen randomly
 - *"Homeless people should try harder to find a job."*

Causes of Prejudice

3. **Social learning**
 - Learning prejudices by watching those around you
 - *"Of course I think all XXX are bad. All my family and friends do, too!"*

Causes of Prejudice

4. **Victimization**
 - View self as a victim of some set of "wrongs" inflicted by other group
 - *"If it weren't for all of THEM taking all our jobs, the economy would be much better!"*

Causes of Prejudice

5. **Scapegoating**
 - Putting blame on another group your own or society's problems
 - *"Society would have no problems if it weren't for THOSE people ruining it for everyone!"*

Interpersonal Attraction

Do opposites attract?

or...

**Do birds of a feather
flock together?**

Factors That Influence Attraction

1. Proximity

- Geographic nearness
- People most likely to like – even marry – someone who is nearby

Factors That Influence Attraction

– Mere exposure effect

- Repeated exposure to things increases our liking for them
- Nonsense syllables, music, Chinese characters, the letters of our own name

Factors That Influence Attraction

2. Physical Attractiveness

- Biggest influence on 1st impressions
- Women more likely to say looks don't matter
 - Studies show this isn't true

Factors That Influence Attraction

2. Physical Attractiveness

- Standards of beauty are cultural



1920s



1950s



2010s

Factors That Influence Attraction

2. Physical Attractiveness

- Similar features found attractive across cultures
 - Infants look longer at faces with those features

Factors That Influence Attraction

3. Similarity

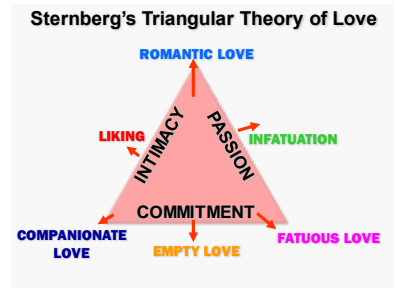
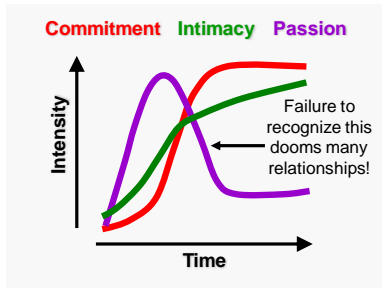
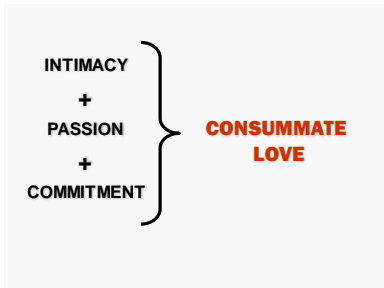
- Friends and couples much more likely to share:
 - Attitudes, beliefs, interests
 - Age, religion, race, education, intelligence, smoking behavior, economic status

Love

- Top 3 things for a successful marriage (2007, Pew Research)
 1. Faithfulness
 2. Happy sex life
 3. Sharing chores

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

- **Intimacy**
 - Emotional closeness
- **Passion**
 - Physical
- **Commitment**
 - Decision to remain with person



- Kitty Genovese
- 1964, murdered outside her apartment in Queens, NY
- Newspaper reported 38 witnessed the crime, no one called police or helped

- June 19, 2008
 - Psychiatric ER
 - Woman falls off chair, thrashes around, lays still
 - 1 hour before docs notified

- April 25, 2010
 - Queens, NY
 - Man helps woman being attacked
 - He's stabbed and lays dying for about 90 min

- October 13, 2011
 - Foshan, China
 - 2 year-old girl run over by 2 vehicles
 - At least 18 people walked past her as she lied in middle of road

WHY???

The Bystander Effect

- Social psychological phenomenon in which individuals do not offer help in an emergency situation when others are present



The Bystander Effect

- Diffusion of Responsibility
 - The more people there are, the less likely any one person will help

# of others	% attempting to help
0	100
1	85
2	75
3	65
4	55

The Bystander Effect

- Audience Inhibition
 - People worry that other bystanders will judge them negatively if they help and the situation isn't a real emergency

Research on the Bystander Effect

- Latane and Darley, late 1960s
 - Series of studies influenced by Genovese murder

Research on the Bystander Effect

- "Smoke under door" study

Condition	% who go for help
ALONE	75
GROUPS OF THREE	40

Research on the Bystander Effect

- "Epileptic seizure" study

Condition	% Help	Time
Alone	90	60
One Other	65	100
Four Others	30	170

Research on the Bystander Effect

- The bystander decision making process
 - Notice the event
 - Interpret as emergency
 - Take responsibility
 - Know what to do
 - Take action

The Bystander Effect

- Effect is reduced when bystanders...
 - know each other
 - think victim is dependent on them
 - have training in emergencies
 - are aware of the bystander effect