Social Psychology

Defining Social Psychology

informal definition: the study of how people think about, influence, and relate to other people

formal definition: the study of how a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others
Groups & Group-influenced Motives

Social Influence: the way others affect us

• Conformity
• Compliance
• Obedience

Conformity

• change in behavior to “fit in with” social norms
  – **Norms** = widely accepted rules on how we “should” behave
• Classic studies
  – Sherif (1936) autokinetic effect
  – Asch (1951) line length estimation task
  – Zimbardo (1973) Stanford Prison Experiment
Conformity

factors involved in conformity

- cohesiveness & group desirability
- group size – Social Influence Model
- social support
- ambiguity

WHY? motivation to conform:

- **normative social influence**: desire to be liked
  - can lead to public conformity

- **informational social influence**: desire to be right
  - can lead to “conversion” - public conformity AND private real acceptance of group perspective
Compliance

• doing what’s asked
  – to receive social rewards and/or avoid social punishments
    • involves a direct request
    • generally one individual influencing another, as opposed to pressure from a group

• procedures used in persuasion / obtaining compliance
  – ingratiation; foot in the door; door in the face…

• ingratiation: efforts to get others to like us
  – target-directed tactics: focus on appeal to others
  – impression management/self-presentation: appeal of self

• foot-in-the-door: small request, followed by larger request (which is the real goal)
  – shift in self-perception to someone who helps others
  – COGNITIVE DISSONANCE - desire for consistency

• door-in-the-face: large request, followed by small request (which is the real goal)
  – reciprocal concessions - reduce demand, reduce resistance
  – complier is concerned with self-presentation
  – anchoring – with larger comparison, request seems smaller

• foot-in-the-door more versatile – self-perception shift is longer lasting than reciprocal concessions
cognitive dissonance

• Leon Festinger (1957)
  – psychological discomfort (dissonance) caused by two inconsistent thoughts
  – 1959 study: have participants do very boring task, then FOR PAY, persuade others to do it by saying it was enjoyable
    • paid $20 to lie: participants rated the task as boring
    • paid $1 to lie: participants rated the task as enjoyable
    • because if I’m only being paid $1, why would I say it was enjoyable? I must actually find it enjoyable!

Obedience

• influence by demand or order, usually from someone with more power
  – Milgram (1963, 1974) experiments
  – factors involved in obedience
    • high status of authority figure
    • belief that someone else responsible
    • absence of clear-cut point for switching to disobedience
    • gradual nature of obedience situation
Conflict & Cooperation

Altruism and Aggression

Bystander Effect & Diffusion of Responsibility

• Kitty Genovese murder, 1964, Queens NYC
  – 28 yr old stabbed outside apartment at night
• INCORRECT but famous New York Times story:
  – 38 witnesses watched, heard screams, did nothing to help, didn’t call police
• ACTUALLY:
  – there weren’t 38 witnesses; some heard noise but didn’t recognize as cry for help; one shouted and attacker fled; murder happened in two attacks over a half hour, the second out of sight and silent; two called police, one came out to help her as she was dying, ETC.
• But misrepresentation of events did prompt research
Altruism

• Selfless acts that help other people with no obvious benefit to the helper

• Why not help?
  – Diffusion of responsibility
  – Pluralistic ignorance

Results for the ‘smoke-filled room’ experiment
• Emergency Response Decision Model
  – Notice the emergency
  – Interpret as emergency
  – Assume responsibility
  – Decide how to help
  – Decide whether to help

• Experiment with seminary students (clergy-in-training) on way to give talk
  – even if planned talk was on a Bible story about helping a stranger (“Good Samaritan”), when told they were running late they didn’t notice or help person in need on the way

• Experiment with unclear relationship between arguers
  – woman in altercation with man down the hall who yelled “why did I ever marry you?” elicited less help from observers than if she yelled “I don’t even know you!” - observers interpreted whether situation required help based on apparent relationship
• Motivational theories on helping
  – empathetic-altruism hypothesis
    • help purely for sake of helping
  – negative-state relief model
    • help to relieve negative emotions experienced in viewing others in need
  – empathetic-joy hypothesis
    • help out of joy received from observing others’ needs being met

Aggression

• behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment
Aggression

• Nature theories
  – psychoanalytic view
    • Thanatos (death wish; Freud)
  – sociobiological view
    • competition for scarce resources and desire for dominance lead to aggression
  – physiological view
    • “violence center” in brain - no; testosterone (male hormone) - somewhat

Aggression

• Nurture theories
  – frustration-aggression theory
    • aggression produced by circumstances
    • frustration when path to desired goal is blocked
    • aggression results – e.g., road rage
    • [relief]

  – social learning theory
    • aggressive behavior is learned
Aggression

• Other factors involved
  – anonymity
    • with increased anonymity, more aggression
  – environmental stress
    • heat, noise, crowding

Social Cognition

• Process through which we notice, interpret, remember, and use information about our social world
• cognitive misers – stingy with cognitive resources, try to get by with least mental effort
• processes: input, process, output
  – attention
  – memory: elaboration, organization, storage, & retrieval
    • self-reference effect: increase retrieval by relating info to self
    • schemas: sets of rules or features representing categories
  – social inference: generating decisions / behavior from information stored in memory
Social Perception

• Process through which we seek to know and understand others
• Why? need to make sense of others’ behavior to know how to behave around them
• How? make attributions - explanations of others’ behavior we infer and assign to them
  – nonverbal communication - seeing behaviors
  – impression formation
    • unified (traits, observations, appearances all combined) and integrated in memory (first impressions, every observation made in context of others, contributing to broader wholistic impression)

• Attributions: process by which make inferences about causes of behaviors & attitudes
  – Heider (1958) & Weiner (1971; 1979) – dimensions of attributions / explanations of behavior:
    • locus of causality: internal vs. external
    • perceived stability: stable vs. unstable
    • perceived controllability: controllable vs. uncontrollable
Example: attributions for explaining Achievement

Locus of Causality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>internal ability</th>
<th>external difficulty of task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unstable</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>luck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controllable (other three factors really aren’t, in this case)

—heuristics & other biases of the “cognitive miser” can lead to errors in attribution

- stereotype: generalization about group’s characteristics that ignores individual variation
- “fundamental attribution error”: exaggeration of internal causes (and underestimation of external causes) in judging others’ behavior; we assume their behavior reflects their qualities and abilities, not their situation
  – as opposed to “self-serving bias” about OURSELVES, in which we favor internal attributions for our successes but external causes for our failures