PSYCH/SOC AMI-1: Attitudes

CLOSE UP

Why might you ignore your own beliefs? We all have certain attitudes that influence how we behave and how we view the world. You might have acquired some of your attitudes as a young child. Others may have developed later in life as you observed your friends' behavior or thought about something you saw, heard, or read. Regardless of how you developed your attitudes, though, you might not always behave according to your beliefs.

This contradictory behavior can be puzzling. Take the act of blood donation, for example. A person may have a positive attitude toward giving blood because he or she knows that it can help sick or injured people. But what if the person is afraid of needles? For some people, a fear of needles can outweigh any positive attitude toward blood donation.

You're more likely to act according to your attitudes if your beliefs are very strong or if you have a strong personal interest in something. The Greenpeace workers shown in the photograph above, for example, are probably firm believers in the Greenpeace mission—to protect the natural environment and solve environmental problems. In this case, their attitudes about the importance of environmental protection are strong enough to motivate their behavior. In this section, you will learn more about the effects of attitudes on behavior.

Understanding Attitudes

Attitudes are beliefs and feelings about objects, people, and events that can affect how people behave in certain situations. A person's attitude about strangers, for example, can influence how that person feels and behaves around people he or she does not know. If a person believes that strangers are dangerous, that person is likely to feel afraid around strangers and may try to avoid situations where he or she is likely to meet new people. On the other hand, if a person believes that strangers are people just like him or her, that person is more likely to feel open to strangers and try to know them better.

Attitudes are a major aspect of social cognition. In fact, our attitudes may be the primary motivator for how we behave and how we view the world. They affect who we are friends with, how we vote, where we live, what we eat, what kind of work we choose, and many other decisions that are central to who we are.

Attitudes are such an important aspect of our psychological lives because they foster strong emotions, such as love or hate. Attitudes can also vary greatly. A person belonging to a particular cultural group may have attitudes that have been shaped by the traditional physical environment of that group. The field of social psychology is devoted to studying human interactions, of which attitude development is prominent. Social psychologists also study areas such as communication, competition, leadership, and cooperation.

Under certain circumstances, a person's attitudes can change. They tend to remain stable, however, unless that person is strongly encouraged to change them. This section examines several aspects of attitudes—how they develop, how they affect behavior, and how behavior affects them.

How Attitudes Develop

People often have attitudes about things they have never experienced directly. People may be opposed to war or capital punishment, for example, even though they have no personal experience of either event. Where do such attitudes come from?

Attitudes develop in several ways. Conditioning, observational learning, cognitive evaluation, and the use of cognitive anchors all play roles in the development of attitudes.

Conditioning Learning through conditioning plays an important role in acquiring attitudes. Children are often reinforced for saying and doing things that are consistent with the attitudes held by their parents, teachers, and other authority figures. For example, parents who believe that it is important to share with others may praise, or reinforce, a child who shares a toy with a friend. Through such conditioning, the child acquires an attitude about the importance of sharing.

Observational Learning People also acquire attitudes through observation. For example, teens may observe that classmates who dress, talk, or act in certain ways seem to be admired by their peers. These teens may adopt the same ways of dressing, talking, or acting because they have learned through observation that doing so might lead to acceptance and approval. Commercial advertising relies heavily on observational learning to shape our attitudes. For example, by seeing commercials on TV, we learn that one brand of cola is cooler or more fun than the other.

Cognitive Evaluation People often evaluate evidence and form beliefs on the basis of their evaluations. This process, which is known as cognitive evaluation, also plays a role in the development of attitudes. People evaluate evidence that comes from many sources.

Part of the process of cognitive evaluation is learning to examine data carefully. When a news story, a politician, or a company provides information—a set of statistics or the results of a scientific study—the end user should ask if the information was gathered properly? For example, bias can be introduced into a survey by asking leading questions, or certain groups of people can be left out of the survey group, and so on. These types of bias can accidentally or purposely skew the survey's results.

Another question to consider is what, if anything, does the person or organization presenting the information have to gain if readers believe it? If, for example, a gum maker's company lab says their gum improves chewers' overall health, is it necessarily true or false?

You cannot know for certain, but there is good reason for healthy skepticism. The fact that the company runs the lab and stands to profit from one result more than another raises issues involving scientific independence and interference.

People are especially likely to evaluate evidence if they think they will have to justify their own attitudes to other people. For example, a teen who wants an after-school job may evaluate the evidence about working if he knows he will have to justify it to his parents. He may ask friends who have part-time jobs how they handle the extra responsibility.

Cognitive Anchors A person's earliest attitudes tend to serve as cognitiveanchors, or persistent beliefs that shape the ways in which he or she sees the world and interprets events. Cognitive anchors tend to keep a person's attitudes from changing. This is less true for attitudes that are only slightly different from the ones we hold. People may make several small changes in attitude over time that together add up to a significant change. People who hold on to cognitive anchors for decades, however, rarely adopt significantly new attitudes. In other words, no amount of cognitive evaluation is likely to cause your grandfather to stray from the baseball team he has supported since childhood.

Attitudes and Behavior

The definition of *attitudes* suggests that people's behaviors are always consistent with their attitudes. However, the link between attitudes and behavior is not always strong. In fact, people often behave in ways that contradict their attitudes. For example, many people know that smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol excessively are harmful to their health, yet they still smoke and drink excessively. Likewise, most people realize that it is dangerous and illegal to drink and drive, yet some do it just the same.

When Behavior Follows Attitudes People are more likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes if the attitudes are specifically tied to the behaviors. For example, someone who believes that aerobic exercise is necessary to prevent heart disease is more likely to exercise regularly than someone who believes that only a healthy lifestyle is important for good health. Similarly, strong attitudes are better predictors of behavior than weak attitudes. Students who believe strongly in the value of hard work, for example, may be more likely to study than students who believe less strongly in the benefits of hard work.

People are also more likely to behave in accordance with their attitudes when they have a vested interest, or a personal stake, in the outcome of a behavior. People are more likely to go to the polls and vote on an issue, for example, if the issue affects them directly.

That is one reason why issues such as tax reform often have high voter turnouts.

Attitudes are more likely to guide behavior when people are aware of them, particularly if the attitudes are put into words and spoken. Verbalizing and repeating an attitude makes it come to mind quickly, and attitudes that come to mind quickly are more likely to influence how people act. People are also more likely to be aware of attitudes that affect them emotionally. Someone who loves animals is likely to be aware of his attitude about animal rights, for example. Likewise, someone who is angered by destruction of the environment is likely to be aware of her attitudes about recycling and conservation.

When Attitudes Follow Behavior Most of the time attitudes come first and behavior follows. However, sometimes the reverse is true. In some situations, attitudes follow behavior.

Attitudes are especially likely to follow behavior when people begin to behave, or are encouraged to behave, in ways that conflict with their attitudes. In such situations, people may suffer cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable feeling of tension that may accompany a contradiction between attitudes and behaviors. In order to reduce the tension they feel, people may try to justify their behavior and change their attitudes to fit their acts.

Most people can relate to a classic example of cognitive dissonance: buyer's remorse. Let's say you have your eye on a used car—a cool old European van from the 1970s. You have fallen in love with the way it looks and the idea of piling your friends into it and driving around town. Once you buy it, though, you start to realize a few things. It does not have air bags or any other safety features to speak of, it is very uncomfortable on long trips, and there is no air conditioning. You experience cognitive dissonance because you were in love with this vehicle and now you are starting to have negative feelings.

How do you eliminate the dissonance? You might tell yourself that safety was never really your thing anyway; you like to live on the edge. Also, this car is mainly for short trips, so it doesn't really matter if you're uncomfortable on the occasional road trip. And who needs air conditioning? It's more fun to have the windows down and blast your music anyway. All of these are ways to overwhelm your negative thoughts and get back to the positive feelings you had before. You could also eliminate the dissonance by selling the car and buying one that meets more of your needs. But that is a much more difficult solution.

1. What are attitudes? _____

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2. Describe the process of cognitive evaluation. _____

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3. How does conditioning shape people's attitudes? _____

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4. How does verbalizing an attitude make it more likely that the attitude will guide your behavior?

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5 What are two of the four ways that people's attitudes develop? _____

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6. In your own words, describe observational learning and cognitive anchors as influences on attitude formation. Are they at all similar? Why?

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7. Give three examples of cognitive anchors that you recognize in yourself. Now rank them from one to three on likeliness that your attitude could be changed (with 3 being most likely). Explain your rankings and whether you think any of these attitudes could actually ever be changed.

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8. In your opinion, are cognitive anchors likely to be subjects of cognitive dissonance? Give reasons for your answer.

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PSYCH/SOC AMI-2: Persuasion

CLOSE UP

What face do you want the world to see? Is there an image of yourself you like to project? How can you persuade others that the image you project is the real you? One way is through the social networking Web site Facebook.

The Psychology of Facebook, a course at Stanford University, was developed by persuasion psychologist Professor B. J. Fogg. The course examines various aspects of the popular site as a persuasive tool. One aspect is the use of profile pictures, the photograph on the front page of the Facebook entry. If a personal photograph is not attached to the allocated space, a question mark appears instead. Fogg proposes the idea that just the uncomfortable feeling of being identified with only a question mark persuades the user to attach his or her personal photograph.

The class also addresses the question of why individuals choose a particular photograph. What impression are they trying to project? Do they want to be regarded in a certain light—as strong, fun-loving, or serious? Fogg asks students to describe the image of themselves that they would want to communicate through their profile picture. The students' responses indicate that choosing the appropriate photo-graph is critical for projecting the impression the individuals want to impart and for persuading others to see them in a certain light. In this section you will learn more about methods of persuasion.

Methods of Persuasion

Attitudes tend to remain constant unless people are motivated to change them—for example, if they are persuaded to do so. **Persuasion** is a direct attempt to influence other people's attitudes or views. Parents, for example, may try to persuade their children to adopt the same values that they hold. Children, on the other hand, may try to persuade their parents to allow them more freedoms and privileges.

There are two basic ways to persuade people. The **central route** uses evidence and logical arguments to persuade people. Advertisements might point out the superior quality of a product, such as the superior taste and nutritional content of a breakfast cereal. Or a parent might use statistics on bicycle accidents to persuade a child to wear a helmet.

The **peripheral route** is indirect. It attempts to associate objects, people, or events with positive or negative cues. For example, an advertisement for athletic shoes might feature a famous athlete. The aim is to influence people to associate their positive feelings for the famous individual with the product or the message that is being endorsed. The most persuasive messages use both routes.

Message and Messenger

In the central route, the message itself is most important. In the peripheral route, the message is important, but it does not stand alone. The messenger also plays an important role.

People present persuasive messages in a number of time-tested and very creative ways. For example, two-sided arguments tend to be more effective than one-sided arguments, especially when the audience is uncertain about its position on the issue. "Glittering generalities" can be offered as evidence which, when examined closely, doesn't amount to much. Also, emotional appeals can be very convincing.

Repetition Research shows that repeated exposure to a stimulus eventually results in a more favorable attitude toward that stimulus. For example, people respond more favorably to abstract art or classical music after being repeatedly exposed to it.

Advertisers, political candidates, and others who want to persuade people use repetition to encourage people to adopt a favorable attitude toward their product or ideas. Many television commercials are repeated over and over so that potential consumers will react favorably to the products—and buy them—when they see these items in the store. One might think that such repetition would offend or annoy viewers (and to some extent it does), but research suggests that commercials are more effective when they are repeated regularly. Similarly, political candidates who appear regularly in television commercials tend to receive more votes than candidates who appear less often in commercials.

Two-Sided Arguments A type of persuasive message that can be particularly effective is the **two-sided argument** With this type, the messenger presents not only his or her side of the argument but also the opposition's side to discredit the opposition's views. For example, a cereal advertiser admits that its brand of cereal is not as sweet as competing brands and then explains how the less sweet taste is evidence that the product is more nutritious. Admitting weaknesses in this way makes the message seem more honest.

Presenting the other side can also undercut the opposition's stance. A two-sided argument can convince the listener that he or she has already heard all the important points, even though only one side has been presented.

Emotional Appeals **Emotional appeals** persuade by arousing such feelings as loyalty, admiration, desire, jealousy, or fear rather than by convincing through evidence and logic. Thus, an emotional appeal is a peripheral route in persuasion.

Arousing fear is a particularly effective method of persuasion. Smokers are more likely to be convinced to quit smoking, for example, when they are presented with frightening photos of blackened lungs rather than dry, unemotional statistics on lung cancer. A politician may stir up fears to distract from real, more mundane problems. In general, appeals based on fear tend to be most effective when they are strong, when the audience believes them, and when the audience believes it can avoid the danger by changing its behavior.

Glittering Generalities The use of vaguely positive words and images in a message promotes good feelings, but what does it really say? Political campaigns often employ glittering generalities. Candidates might be described as "good for America," "the right person for our community," or a "person who gets things done." None of these things cites specific evidence of ability or promises any notable result for the future.

Commercial advertisements also employ a wide range of glittering generalities when delivering their messages. For example, a soap maker may say that their product gives you "that mountain-fresh feeling." There's something vaguely appealing about that, but what does it really tell a potential buyer? A sausage maker's claim of "down-home goodness" conjures the image of a hearty breakfast on the farm, but does the message transmit any truly useful information?

Role of the Messenger Some people are more persuasive than others. Research shows that people are persuasive if they are

- experts. This makes the audience more likely to follow their advice.
- trustworthy. This makes the audience more likely to believe what they say.
- physically attractive. This makes the audience likely to pay attention to them.
- similar to their audience in ethnicity, age, and other physical characteristics. People are more likely to imitate others who appear similar to themselves.

Messengers who stand to gain from their persuasive efforts are less likely than others to be effective. For example, if the president of a company says his or her company's product is the best one on the market, people are generally less likely to be persuaded by his or her arguments. An independent scientist, on the other hand, is a more convincing messenger.

Situation and Audience

When a person is in a good mood, he or she is less likely to evaluate messages carefully. As a result, people tend to be more receptive to persuasion when they are feeling good. Thus, putting people in a good mood—with a compliment, for example—tends to boost the acceptance of persuasive messages.

Most messages are aimed at a specific audience. A political candidate is trying to reach the voters in his or her district, for example. Differences in age, sex, and other characteristics of the intended audience influence how the message should be delivered to be most persuasive. Emotional appeals may work better with children, for example, whereas logic may be more effective with adults.

Resisting Persuasive Messages

Some people are less easily persuaded than others. For example, some people have developed an attitude called **sales resistance**. People possessing sales resistance have no trouble turning down requests to buy products or services. Other people have little or no sales resistance. They find it difficult to refuse a sales pitch or other types of requests.

Research suggests that two personality factors may be involved in sales resistance—self-esteem and social anxiety. People who find it easy to refuse requests tend to have high self-esteem and low social anxiety. They believe in themselves, stand up for what they want, and are not overly concerned about what other people think of them.

People who find it difficult to say no, on the other hand, are likely to have lower self esteem and greater social anxiety. They may worry what salespeople will think of them, for example, or be concerned that the people requesting donations will be insulted if they refuse to give. People with low self-esteem and high social anxiety are also likely to be easily persuaded in situations other than sales and donations. For example, they may be more easily persuaded to engage in activities that go against their attitudes, beliefs, and values, such as using alcohol or other drugs.

1. What is the significance of the audience when it comes to persuasion? _____

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2. How might the use of the situation and the audience easily be combined to aid in persuasion?

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3. What are the two central routes of persuasion? _____

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4. What factors keep some people from developing sales resistance? Explain.

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5. Does delivering the same message over and over again aid in persuasion? What is this technique called, and how does it work?

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6. In what kind of persuasion is the messenger important? _____

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7. Give brief explanations of the central route and the peripheral route of persuasion. How are they different?

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8. In your opinion, which of the two types of persuasion, the central route or the peripheral route, is more reputable? Give reasons to support your opinion.

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PSYCH/SOC AMI-3: Prejudice

CLOSE UP

Is there anything wrong with female firefighters? Chances are, you do not see anything out of the ordinary about the idea of female firefighters. But some people believe that women simply are not capable of being firefighters—or of being construction workers, police officers, soldiers, or any number of other traditionally male occupations. Indeed, women firefighters are a relatively recent phenomenon; there were few women firefighters in the United States before the mid-1970s, when lawsuits, government action, and changing attitudes helped open the doors to the nation's firehouses.

Even after women began proving their abilities as firefighters, they often faced prejudice and discrimination from their male co-workers, ranging from crude jokes to harassment to denial of training or promotion. In fact, one survey by the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services found that 88 percent of women firefighters had experienced sexual harassment at some point in their careers. Even in the most progressive departments women are still a minority and often face hazing. Prejudice based on sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or another category can have a profound effect on the people being discriminated against as well as on society at large. In this section, you will learn more about the causes and effects of prejudice.

The Prejudicial View

A type of attitude that causes a great deal of harm is prejudice. **Prejudice**—a generalized attitude toward a specific group of people—literally means "prejudgment." People who are prejudiced judge other people on the basis of their group membership rather than as individuals. People who are prejudiced may decide, for example, that one person is deceitful because he or she belongs to a particular ethnic group or that another person is highly intelligent because that individual belongs to another ethnic group. Prejudicial attitudes are based on stereotypes, and they often lead to harmful behavior known as discrimination.

Stereotypes Stereotypes are unchanging, oversimplified, and usually distorted beliefs about groups of people. People tend to develop or adopt stereotypes as a way to organize information about their social world. Stereotypes make it easier to interpret the behavior of others, even though the interpretations are often wrong. For example, if we expect an older man to be sexist because a sexist attitude is part of our stereotype of older males, then we are more likely to interpret his words and deeds as sexist.

Another reason people tend to develop stereotypes is because they assume that those who are different from themselves are similar to each other in many ways. Traits seen in some members of a group are incorrectly assumed to characterize all members of the group. An Asian American may think, for example, that all European Americans or all African Americans have similar personality traits, behavior patterns, or attitudes.

Stereotypes are harmful because they ignore people's individual natures and assign traits to them on the basis of the groups to which they belong. One of the many problems with stereotyping is that the traits assigned are usually negative. However, stereotypes can also include positive traits—such as the belief that members of a particular group are hard workers.

Stereotype threat is a phenomenon that occurs when members of a group are aware of a stereotype that says they cannot perform a certain task —along the lines of "white men can't jump." When they try to perform this task, knowledge of the stereotype causes them to perform worse than they normally would.

For example, researchers performed a study to investigate the stereotype that white athletes have more "sports intelligence," while African American athletes have more "natural athletic ability." When white and black athletes performed a physical task without reference to this stereotype, they both performed well. But when researchers told the subjects that the task measured "natural athletic ability," the white athletes performed less well. When researchers told subjects that the task measured "sports intelligence," the African American athletes' performance declined.

Stereotypes limit possibilities by discouraging the expression of the full range of an individual's talents, interests, and feelings. Even positive stereotypes can be harmful because they may put pressure on people to live up to unrealistic expectations.

Discrimination Prejudice often leads to negative behavior in the form of discrimination. **Discrimination** refers to the unfair treatment of individuals because they are members of a particular group. For example, people may be denied jobs, housing, voting privileges, or other rights because of their skin color, sex, or religion. But these are not the only forms of discrimination. In 2008, researchers showed that discrimination against overweight people is on the rise and now occurs more often than racial discrimination. Victims of every type of discrimination often begin to see themselves as inferior. Thus, they are likely to have low self-esteem. People with low self-esteem tend to have low expectations for themselves, thus reducing their chances for success.

Causes of Prejudice

Why are some people prejudiced and others are not? Psychologists and other researchers have studied the origins of prejudice and have found many potential causes.

Exaggerating Differences One reason some people are prejudiced is that they exaggerate how different others are from themselves. People tend to prefer (as friends and acquaintances) those who are similar to themselves and who share their attitudes. People who differ in one or several ways—in skin color or religion, for example—are often assumed to have attitudes and customs that are more different than they really are.

Justifying Economic Status People also tend to develop prejudices against those who belong to a different, often lower earning, economic group. Those in higher socioeconomic groups often justify their own economic superiority by assuming that people who have a lower economic status are inferior to them. They may believe that people who are worse off than themselves work less hard or are less motivated to succeed. Such beliefs may be used as an excuse for—and thus help maintain—existing injustices.

Social Learning Children, like adults, acquire many attitudes from other people. They are especially likely to acquire the attitudes of their parents. Children tend to imitate their parents, and parents often reinforce their children when they do. In this way, parents who are prejudiced often pass along their prejudicial attitudes to their children.

Victimization Sometimes people who are the victims of prejudice feel empathy for others who are discriminated against. However, this is not always the case. In fact, some victims of prejudice try to gain a sense

of power and pride by asserting their superiority over people that are even worse off than themselves. Thus, victimization may lead to further prejudice.

Scapegoating A **scapegoat** is an individual or group that is blamed for the problems of others because the real cause of the problems is either too complex, too powerful, or too remote to be confronted. The term *scapegoating* refers to aggression against the targeted group.

The scapegoat group is likely to have certain characteristics that make it a safe and highly visible target. Typically, scapegoats are people who are too weak to defend themselves or who choose not to return the attack. They are also likely to stand out because of their differences from majority groups.

Probably the best-known and most extreme example of scapegoating is the victimization of European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler blamed Jewish people for Germany's serious economic troubles. Under Hitler's leadership, millions of Jews were killed.

Overcoming Prejudice

Although prejudice is difficult to overcome, it can be done. Increased contact among members of different groups is one of the best ways for people to develop less prejudicial attitudes. For example, when people work together to achieve common goals, they are likely to learn about one another as individuals, and this may weaken the stereotypes.

On an individual level, one can reduce prejudice by speaking up when other people act or talk in ways that reflect prejudicial attitudes. Individuals can also set an example of tolerance and understanding for others by their own words and actions.

Finally, prejudicial attitudes do not have to lead to discriminatory behavior. A person who is prejudiced can make a conscious effort to treat all people courteously and fairly. This, in turn, may help reduce the person's own prejudicial attitudes.

1. What is the connection between stereotyping and discrimination? _____

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2. Name and describe three potential causes of prejudice. _____

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3. How can increased contact between groups help to lessen prejudice?_____

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4. How does a prejudiced person judge other people? _____

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5. How does stereotype threat affect individuals who are the subject of stereotypes?

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6. What does the term *scapegoat* mean? _____

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7. Explain the cause-effect relationship between prejudice and discrimination.

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8. Do prejudicial attitudes always lead to discriminatory behavior? Explain.

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PSYCH/SOC AMI-4: Social Perception

CLOSE UP

Can your face give you away? Have you ever told a lie, only to have someone say, "I can tell by your face that you're lying"? A study by Canadian researchers showed that although people can be skillful at lying, it is hard to hide completely the emotions revealed on your face. One researcher concluded that "unlike body language, you can't monitor or completely control what's going on on your face.

The researchers focused on a case involving a Canadian man named Michael White. In 1995, White made a sobbing public appeal for the return of his missing wife. A few days later, claiming to be frustrated by the slow police search, White angrily said he would search for his wife himself and led searchers to her body. He was eventually convicted of his wife's murder. Upon carefully analyzing White's earlier emotional plea, the researchers detected flashes of anger and disgust on his face, signs that had not been noticed before. Most people saw only the expressions of concern and fear.

These involuntary facial movements and expressions are an example of nonverbal communication, which you'll read about in this section.

Forming Perceptions

Social perception refers to the ways in which people perceive one another. Social perception affects the attitudes people form toward one another.

A person will often wear his or her best clothes to a job interview or for a first date. Likewise, defense attorneys encourage their clients to dress well when they are in the courtroom and within view of the jury. The reason? People think that their first impressions of other people are accurate, and first impressions are often based on how a person looks. The tendency for people to form opinions of others on the basis of first impressions is called the **primacy effect**.

First impressions are important because they may have lasting effects on our relationships with others. If our first impression of a new acquaintance is negative because the person appears to be self-centered, for example, then we are unlikely to want to know the person better. However, if our first impression is positive—the person seems friendly and interesting—then we are more likely to want to develop a relationship with that person.

How people interpret the future behavior of others is also influenced by their first impressions. For example, someone who impresses us as intelligent and well educated is more likely to be taken seriously in future encounters than someone who comes across as superficial and silly.

The **recency effect** occurs when people change their opinions of others on the basis of recent interactions instead of holding on to their first impressions. If someone you initially thought was quiet tells long, loud stories the next three times you see him or her, the recency effect might come into play.

Attribution Theory

People often explain the behavior of others and their own behavior differently. According to **attribution theory**, people tend to explain behavior in terms of either dispositional, or personality, factors or in terms of situational, or external, factors. For example, suppose you meet someone at a party who seems reluctant to talk to other people. You may assume that this person is either shy or conceited. This assumption would be a

dispositional attribution. On the other hand, you may assume that this person is usually friendly but simply does not know anyone at the party. This would be a situational attribution.

Fundamental Attribution Error The tendency to overestimate the effect of dispositional causes for another person's behavior, and to underestimate situational causes, is referred to as the **fundamental attribution error**. It is a common mistake that affects many of our interactions with other people.

Actor-Observer Bias For the most part, people tend to attribute the behavior of others to dispositional, or internal, factors and to attribute their own behavior to situational, or external, factors. This tendency is called the **actor-observer bias**. Actor-observer **bias** occurs because we tend to judge others only by the behavior we witness, and people's behavior may not always be a true reflection of their personalities.

Suppose you observe a stranger acting in a rude manner. If this is your only encounter with the person, you are likely to assume that the stranger has a rude disposition—that is, that he or she is a rude person. In most other situations, however, the same person might behave in a very polite fashion. Observing the stranger in most other situations, then, would lead to the assumption that he or she has a polite, respectful disposition. This may in fact be the case. The person might have acted rudely only because of the circumstances. Perhaps the person was provoked. Or maybe he or she was irritable due to lack of sleep or a tough day at work.

Self-Serving Bias People are more likely to attribute their own successes to dispositional, or personality, factors. They are also more likely to attribute their failures to situational factors. This is called a **self-serving bias**. The self-serving bias allows individuals to place the blame for their failures on circumstances outside their control. At the same time, however, it enables them to take full credit for their successes.

Nonverbal Communication

It is not only what people say and do but how they say and do it that influences our perceptions of them. Forms of nonverbal, or unspoken, communication include facial expressions, gestures, posture, and the distance we keep from others. These and other forms of "body language" affect our perceptions of people, largely because they often indicate feelings. Feelings of sympathy or anger, for example, may be inferred from a concerned look or frown.

Some nonverbal forms of communication are learned early. Even young children can "read" a tone of voice, a facial expression, or other forms of nonverbal communication. Thus, before they understand all the words their parents are speaking, they can tell from nonverbal communication how their parents are feeling.

Without necessarily being aware of it, people use nonverbal communication to send messages to other people. They may even use nonverbal communication to mask their true feelings. For example, a parent who wishes to hide his fear or worry from his child might use nonverbal forms of communication, such as smiles and a relaxed bearing, to convince the child that all is well.

Physical Contact Touching is one way in which people communicate nonverbally. However, not all people use physical contact to communicate with others. For example, American women are more likely than American men to touch the people with whom they are interacting.

Touching can be an effective means of communication. In one experiment, college students who had filled out several personality questionnaires were asked by the experimenter to stay and help in another study.

Students who were touched during the request were more likely to help in the subsequent study. In another study, waitresses received larger tips when they touched customers on the hand or shoulder while making change.

A study in a nursing home found that the ways in which people respond to touch depend on many factors. In the study, whether the residents responded to the touching favorably or unfavorably depended on the status of the staff member doing the touching, the type of touch, and the part of the body that was touched. Touching was not appreciated when it was inappropriate or forceful.

Eye Contact People can learn a great deal about the feelings of others from eye contact. When someone who is talking looks directly into the eyes of the listener, for example, the talker is usually telling the truth.

Avoidance of eye contact, on the other hand, may indicate that the talker is lying. This is why a message is more believable and persuasive when the messenger makes eye contact with the audience.

One type of eye contact is gazing, or looking at someone with a steady, intent look that conveys eagerness or attention. Gazing usually is interpreted as a sign of friendliness, and it may greatly influence relationships.

Another type of eye contact is staring, or looking fixedly with wide-open eyes. Staring is usually interpreted as a sign of anger. Being the object of staring makes most people uncomfortable, and they may try to avoid the stare. For example, one study found that drivers who were stared at by other drivers at an intersection crossed the intersection faster when the light changed.

Cultural Considerations There is, however, considerable cultural variation in the use of nonverbal communication. The way Americans communicate nonverbally with one another is not necessarily the same way that people communicate in other parts of the world.

The distance people keep from one another varies in different cultures around the world. In general, Americans like to have a good deal of space. We generally position ourselves “at arm’s length,” or about two feet apart, from acquaintances. On the other hand, a person from Japan may feel that this is too close, preferring a distance of about three feet, while a person from Costa Rica will be quite comfortable with less than two feet of space.

Without taking cultural differences into account, it might be easy for an American to attribute the greater space needed by a Japanese person as a sign of coldness or arrogance. Likewise, the closeness of the Costa Rican might come off as aggression.

What is normal in terms of physical touching and eye contact also varies greatly between cultures. There is great variation within every culture, though. For example, even though most Americans prefer a good deal of personal space, it is not unusual to meet someone who stands only eight inches from you while chatting.

Regardless of what culture they live in, most people send unspoken messages that can greatly influence how other people see them—whether they know it or not. Thus, becoming more aware of nonverbal communication can increase our understanding of others.

1. How are the primary and recency effects different? _____

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2. What are dispositional factors and situational factors? _____

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3. What are three kinds of nonverbal communication that affect how people perceive one another?

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4. What does social perception mean? _____

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5. What is the term for people's tendency to form opinions of others based on first impressions?

_____

6. The actor-observer bias describes what two basic human tendencies? _____

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_____

7. If you read that people in a country you were about to visit were more likely to touch people when communicating, would that change your behavior during your visit? Explain.

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8. Give two examples that illustrate actor-observer bias. _____

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PSYCH/SOC AMI-5: Interpersonal Attraction

CLOSE UP

Is beauty really in the eye of the beholder? What people consider attractive certainly varies among cultures. For the Wodaabe, a nomadic people in the west African countries of Niger and Nigeria, men are central to the group's ideas of beauty. Every year, young Wodaabe men take part in a festival called Gerewol. An important aspect of the festival is the beauty contests, in which the men show off their good looks to the Wodaabe women, who act as judges. Beauty for Wodaabe men consists of having large round eyes, a long straight nose, white teeth, and light skin.

The Wodaabe concept of beauty contrasts with such concepts in the West, where the beauty of women often receives more attention. Western cultures generally attribute beauty to women, rarely to men. Women are described as "beautiful," whereas, "handsome" describes men's physical appearance.

Whether or not you consider a certain individual attractive depends on what physical qualities you value. Although some concepts of what constitutes physical attractiveness are universal, many ideas of beauty vary from culture to culture. Wherever we live, concepts of beauty affect our personal relationships.

Physical Appearance

Attraction is the process by which people are drawn to others who appeal to them in a number of ways. Attraction to another person often leads to friendship or love. Factors that attract us to particular people as potential friends or partners include physical appearance, similarity to ourselves, and evidence that our attraction is returned.

Physical appearance tends to influence our choice of friends and partners. What qualities make someone physically attractive? There is no single answer. Some people may find a slim body build most attractive, while others may prefer a more muscular build. Some people find blond hair most attractive; others may prefer black hair. Still others don't care about hair color but prefer curly hair. Clearly, people's ideas of attractiveness differ.

Universals of Beauty

Although there is variation among people in the types of traits they consider attractive, some aspects of attractiveness appear to be widely shared or even universal. For example, a smiling person is generally perceived to be more attractive than a person who is frowning.

Studies have also found that certain types of facial features are attractive to most people. In one study, both British and Japanese people were asked to identify the types of features they found most attractive in women. People from both cultures identified large eyes, high cheekbones, and narrow jaws as the most attractive types of facial features.

Another study investigated the kinds of faces that infants find most attractive. This was judged by the amount of time the infants spent looking at the faces of strangers—the longer the gaze, the greater the presumed attraction. As early as the age of two months, infants in the study seemed to prefer faces that were also rated by adults as most attractive. This evidence suggests that we do not "learn" what is attractive by being socialized in a particular culture. Other research, however, indicates that people do learn what features are considered attractive.

Differences in Body Shape Preference Although preferences for certain facial features may be universal, preferences for body shape vary greatly. There is, in fact, a great deal of variation in people's standard for attractiveness of body shape—both in the shape we prefer in others and the shape we perceive ourselves as having.

This was demonstrated in a study of college men and women. The men in the study tended to believe their own body shape closely approached the "ideal" shape that women find attractive. However, the women tended to believe that they were heavier than the "ideal" shape men find attractive.

The results of this study are important. They suggest that females are more likely than males to incorrectly think they are too heavy to be attractive. Not surprisingly, women are more likely than men to go on weight-loss diets, and they have far higher rates of eating disorders.

Evidence suggests that in the United States, many men prefer their partners to be shorter than themselves, whereas many women prefer their partners to be taller. On the job as well as in relationships, tallness tends to be perceived as an asset for men, whereas height in women tends to have less impact on their jobs.

This is not to say, however, that physical appearance will determine an individual's ability to succeed on the job or in relationships. The initial attraction one feels for another person may be based on the person's physical appearance. However, other traits usually become more important as people get to know one another better. Traits such as honesty, loyalty, warmth, and sensitivity tend to be more important than physical appearance in forming and maintaining long-term relationships.

Similarity and Reciprocity

You may be familiar with the saying "Birds of a feather flock together." This saying suggests that we are usually attracted to people who are similar to us. On the other hand, another popular saying asserts "Opposites attract." Which of these two contradictory statements is true? Generally speaking, the answer is that we are more attracted to people who are similar to us.

Similarity in Physical Attractiveness According to the **matching hypothesis**, people tend to choose as friends and partners those who are similar to themselves in attractiveness. One reason for this may be the fear of rejection—the belief that someone more attractive will not be interested in them.

Similarity in Other Characteristics People's friends and partners also tend to be similar to them in race, ethnicity, age, level of education, and religion. One reason we choose friends and partners with backgrounds that are similar to our own is that we tend to live among people who are similar to ourselves. Thus, these are the people we are most likely to meet, to know, to date, and possibly to marry.

Another reason people tend to choose friends and partners with similar backgrounds is that such people often have similar attitudes as well—and people tend to be attracted to others with attitudes similar to their own. In fact, similarity of attitudes is a key contributor to attraction in both friendships and romantic relationships. Attitudes toward religion and children tend to be the most important factors in people's attraction to potential partners.

Reciprocity When we have feelings of attraction or affection for another person, we want that person to return those feelings. **Reciprocity** is the mutual exchange of feelings or attitudes. It applies to situations in which the person we like likes us back. In other words, our feelings are returned, or reciprocated. Like similarity, reciprocity is a powerful contributor to feelings of attraction.

Reciprocity of feelings is a major factor in forming romantic relationships, but it may also apply to casual encounters. Research shows that people are more open, warm, and helpful when they are talking with strangers who seem to like them.

Friendship and Love

Friends are people for whom one has affection, respect, and trust. Most people value friends because of the rewards that friendship offers. For example, friends are concerned about one another and help and support one another when they can.

As friendships develop, people may evaluate, consciously or unconsciously, how well the relationship is providing the rewards they seek in the friendship.

The people we choose as friends tend to be people with whom we have frequent contact, such as a fellow student. The people we find attractive and the people who approve of us are the people we are likely to choose as friends. In addition, they are likely to be similar to us in many ways, such as in attitudes, values, and their selection of other friends.

Friendship is different from love. We use the word *love* in several ways. Love refers to the feelings of attachment between children and parents, siblings, and other family members. Love also refers to feelings of patriotism for one's country or to feelings of passion about strongly held values, such as freedom. Most commonly, however, love refers to the feelings of mutual attraction, affection, and attachment shared by people who are "in love."

To better understand the relationships of people in love, psychologist Robert Sternberg developed the **triangular model of love**. Sternberg identifies seven types of love relationships: romantic love, liking, companionate love, empty love, fatuous love, infatuation, and consummate love. Each of the seven is characterized by at least one of three components: intimacy, passion, or commitment.

Intimacy refers to closeness and caring. It is reflected by mutual concern and by the sharing of feelings and resources. **Passion** refers to feelings of romantic and sexual attraction. In addition to verbal expressions of love, passion is reflected by many types of nonverbal communication, such as gazing, hugging, and kissing. **Commitment** refers to a couple's recognition that they are "in love" and want to be together, "for better or for worse."

Several of the seven forms of love are characterized by only one of the three components. For example, infatuated love is passion without intimacy or commitment, while empty love is commitment without passion or intimacy. Several others combine two aspects. Romantic love is intimacy and passion without commitment, for example. According to Sternberg, only consummate love, which is an ideal that is difficult to attain, is characterized by all three components.

Most couples start out with feelings of physical attraction that may develop into passion. If they are compatible, their intimacy and passion may grow. Eventually, they may decide to make a commitment to each other. Thus, from dating to a steady relationship to marriage, love changes as our relationships endure, deepen, and become a more important part of our lives.

1. **What part of attraction is more universal, and what parts are more particular to individual preferences?**

2. **Why is similarity important in forming relationships?**

3. **Are people's feelings about attractiveness inborn or learned? Explain.**

4. **What is the matching hypothesis? Give a reason why it influences attitudes and actions.**

5. **How does the way that women view their body shape compare with the way that men view their body shape? How does this affect women?**

6. **Why is reciprocity of feeling so important—even for casual encounters?**

7. **Why do you think it is that, although physical attraction is initially crucial, traits such as honesty and loyalty later become more important to a relationship?**