

FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Do birds of a feather flock together—or do opposites attract? Does absence make the heart grow fonder—or does out of sight more often mean out of mind? The saying “birds of a feather flock together” suggests that those who are alike (*birds of a feather*) will tend to associate with each other (*flock together*). Is this true—or are those who are very different from each other (*opposites*) more likely to form relationships (*to be attracted*)? Does being separated from a loved one increase desire (*does absence make the heart grow fonder*)—or does it actually reduce time spent thinking about the person (*does out of sight mean out of mind*)? **Social psychologists** attempt to answer these, and similar, questions by scientifically studying how we think about, influence, and relate to one another.

Social Thinking

The Fundamental Attribution Error

. . . *a cold person*. In this context, *a cold person* is someone who shows little or no emotion, sympathy, or kindness. In one experiment, if a woman acted friendly, she was perceived by the observers as a kind and caring (*warm*) person; if she acted in an unfriendly, uncaring manner, she was perceived as an unemotional and unkind individual (*a cold person*). This misperception occurred even when the observers were informed that she was simply acting like an unfriendly person—that is, they attributed her behavior to her *personal traits* even if her behavior was due to the *situation*, a phenomenon called the **fundamental attribution error**.

A partner must decide whether a loved one’s *acid-tongued remark* reflects *a bad day* or *a serious rejection*. How we make attributions can have serious consequences (*real-life effects*). Couples must make a decision about whether their partner’s sarcastic or unkind comment (*acid-tongued remark*) is the result of some situational influence, such as a stressful day at work (*a bad day*), or was meant to show severe disapproval or dismissal (*serious rejection*).

. . . *freeloaders*. This term refers to people who voluntarily live off of other people, or who use other people as a source of financial support. Those who believe that people are poor and/or unemployed because of personal traits tend to underestimate the influence of situational variables. Thus, they might call someone who is receiving financial assistance from a government agency or program a *freeloader* rather than simply a victim of circumstances.

Attitudes and Actions

People also come to believe in *what they have stood up for*. Not only will people support (*stand up for*) their strong convictions by taking appropriate action, but they will also develop convictions about things that they have taken action to support (*what they have stood up for*). Many lines (*streams*) of evidence confirm the principle that beliefs can be changed to correspond with people’s actions (*attitudes follow behavior*). There is a reciprocal relationship between our **attitudes** and our actions—our *attitudes* affect our *actions* and our *actions* affect our *attitudes*.

. . . “*brainwashed*” . . . This term refers to a person’s beliefs, values, and attitudes being changed by relentless indoctrination and mental torture. One component of this mind-changing process involves use of the **foot-in-the-door phenomenon**, which is the tendency for people who have first agreed to a small request to comply later with a larger request. Frequently, people will change their attitudes so that they are consistent with their new behavior (*doing becomes believing*).

After giving in to a request to harm an innocent victim—by making *nasty comments* or delivering electric shocks—*people begin to look down on their victim*. In this context, to “*look down*” on someone means to view that person as inferior. In experiments where researchers coerce or push (*coax*) participants to do something against their moral standards—for example, to make cruel remarks (*nasty comments*) about someone—the participants start to view the innocent person with less kindness or consideration (*people begin to look down on their victim*). The participants’ attitudes changed to be consistent with their uncharacteristic behavior.

(Margin note) To Zimbardo (2004, 2007), *a bad barrel, not a few bad apples, led to the abuse . . .* The saying that “*one rotten apple can spoil a whole barrel of good apples*” implies that one unscrupulous person (*bad apple*) can have a corrupting effect on others. Thus, it is one or two bad people (*a few bad apples*), and not the situation they find themselves in (*the barrel*), that causes people to behave unethically. But Philip Zimbardo takes the opposite point of view. He suggests that the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison was the result of a situation that ordinary people found themselves in (*the barrel*) and not of the presence of one or two unethical and cruel people (*a few bad apples*).

If we are *down in the dumps*, we can do as cognitive therapists advise: We can talk in more positive, self-accepting ways with fewer *self-put-downs*. When our attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent, we feel a certain amount of tension (*cognitive dissonance*), which makes us want to do something to reduce this uncomfortable state. Thus, if we are feeling depressed (*down in the dumps*) and we behave in a more outgoing manner, talk in a more positive way, reduce self-criticism (*use fewer self-put-downs*), and *act* as though we are happy, we may in fact start feeling much better. As Myers notes, the *attitudes-follow-behavior principle* can have a positive effect by helping us become better people.

Social Influence

Conformity and Obedience

Fish swim in schools. Birds fly in flocks. Many animals gather together and travel in groups. For example, fish form groups (*they swim in schools*) and so do birds (*they fly in flocks*). Humans are similar in many ways (*we are social animals*). Often, without conscious awareness, we imitate and copy the actions, emotional and verbal expressions, and attitudes of other members of our particular reference group (*we are natural mimics*). In this way, behavioral patterns tend to be automatically transmitted from one person to another (*behavior is catchy* or contagious). This phenomenon is called the *chameleon effect* and it helps us to empathize—to feel what others feel.

When people conform to influences that support what we approve, *we applaud them for being “open-minded” and “sensitive” enough to be “responsive.”* We can be influenced by others because they provide useful knowledge or because we want them to view us favorably and not to ignore us. **Conformity** that is consistent with what we believe to be true will be seen in a positive light—for example, we think that the conformists are being “*open-minded*” and “*sensitive*” enough to be “*responsive*.” When conformity influences people to *oppose* what we approve of, we disparage (*scorn*) them for their lack of insight and ready submissiveness (*their “blind, thoughtless” willingness to give in to others’ wishes*).

Professor Milgram’s assistant asks you and another person to *draw slips from a hat* to see who will be the “*teacher*” and who will be the “*learner*.” In Stanley Milgram’s famous obedience experiments, participants were deceived into believing they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (“*teacher*” or “*learner*”) by picking a piece of paper out of a container (*drawing slips*

from a hat). All the participants were actually “*teachers*” and were asked to “*shock*” the “*learners*” by pressing a small lever (*flipping a switch*) whenever they made mistakes on a memory task. A majority of the participants complied with the experimenter’s request.

You draw back, but the experimenter *prods* you. “Please continue—the experiment requires that you continue.” If you were a participant (*a “teacher”*) in Milgram’s experiment, the research assistant would pressure (*prod*) you to carry on with the experiment even though you might show great reluctance (*you draw back*) after hearing the “*learner’s*” cries of distress at being “*shocked*.”

And in a French reality TV show replication, 80 percent of people, *egged on* by a cheering audience, obeyed and tortured a *screaming* victim (de Moraes, 2010). To be “*egged on*” means to be actively encouraged or pushed into doing something. When Milgram’s obedience study was replicated on a reality TV show, and with the audience actively cheering and shouting encouragement (*egging them on*), 80 percent of the people (acting as “*teachers*”) obeyed and delivered painful “*shocks*” to a loudly protesting (*screaming*) victim.

With kindness and obedience on a collision course, obedience usually won. Milgram’s research on obedience showed that social factors that foster conformity are powerful enough to make almost any one of us behave in ways inconsistent with our beliefs. When people were in conflict over (*torn between*) whether to refuse to harm an individual or to follow orders (*with kindness and obedience on a collision course*), they usually did what they were asked to do (*obedience usually won*).

Using the *foot-in-the-door* effect, Milgram began with *a little tickle of electricity and advanced step by step*. In his experiments, Milgram used the *foot-in-the-door* tactic to persuade participants (“*teachers*”) to comply with his requests to “*shock*” the “*learners*” with larger and larger voltages of electricity. He started by asking the “*teacher*” to use a low level of shock (*a little tickle of electricity*) on the “*learner*. Then, after obtaining compliance (*obedience*) for this small request, it became easier to get the participants (“*teachers*”) to increase the level of shock (*they advanced step by step*). The participants who delivered the “*shocks*” (*threw the switches*) tended to rationalize their behavior; as Myers notes, *great evils sometimes grow out of people’s acceptance of lesser evils*.

Cruelty does not require devilish villains. All it takes is ordinary people corrupted by an evil situation. We tend to think that pain and suffering (*cruelty*) are always caused by inhumane, brutal, and nasty people (*devilish villains*). However, social psychology research shows that almost all people (*ordinary people*) can be led to behave badly given the right—or wrong—circumstances (*they can be corrupted by an evil situation*).

Much as water dissolves salt but not sand, so *rotten situations turn some people into bad apples* while others resist (Johnson, 2007). It has been said that one *rotten apple* in a barrel of good *apples* can turn them all bad—someone who is a “*rotten apple*” has a corrupting influence on others. Circumstances (*social control or the power of the situation*) interact with *the power of the individual (personal control)*. Sometimes the unpleasant or nasty predicaments people find themselves in (*rotten situations*) can lead them to behave in unacceptable or unethical ways (*can turn them into bad apples*). However, other people in similar circumstances might be able to resist corruption and do the opposite of what is expected. Just as water has a different effect on salt and sand, so too do bad circumstances (*atrocious-producing situations*) have different effects on different people. Some people give in to the situation, while others do not.

Rosa Parks’ refusal to sit at the back of the bus *ignited* the U.S. civil rights movement. In areas of the U.S. where racial segregation was practiced, Black people were required to sit in the rear area of the bus, separate from White people. Rosa Parks, a Black female activist, refused, and her defiance

motivated (*ignited*) the U.S. Civil rights movement. This is an example of *minority influence*—the power of one or two individuals to change or sway majorities.

When you are the minority, you are far more likely to *sway* the majority if you *hold firmly to your position* and don't *waffle*. Committed individuals and small groups of individuals can convince (*sway*) the majority to their point of view if they adhere strictly to their agenda or beliefs (*hold firmly to their position*) and do not appear to be uncertain or unsure (*waffle*).

Group Influence

In a team tug-of-war, do we exert more than, less than, or the same amount of effort as in a one-on-one tug-of-war? Tug-of-war is a game in which opponents pull on each end of a rope. When two individuals compete (*a one-on-one tug-of-war*), they work much harder (*exert more effort*) than if they were members of a team competing on the same task. This lowering of individual effort when part of a group is called **social loafing**. (Note that “*to loaf*” means to “work less hard,” to *slack off*, to “take it easy,” or to *free ride*.)

After the discussions, those in Boulder *had moved further left*, and those in Colorado Springs *further right*. Traditionally, those who hold liberal (*Democratic*) beliefs are referred to as being *left-wing*. In contrast, conservative (*Republican*) beliefs are called *right-wing*. In an experiment on **group polarization** (the strengthening of a group's preexisting attitudes through discussion within the group), people who had conservative views before the discussion—like many people in Colorado Springs—had even stronger conservative views after (*they moved further right*). People who had liberal attitudes before the discussion—like many people in Boulder—had stronger liberal views after (*they moved further left*).

Thinking Critically About: The Internet as Social Amplifier

I cut my eye teeth in social psychology with experiments on *group polarization* . . . The expression “*to cut one's eye teeth*” means to acquire knowledge or gain awareness of something new. Myers' career in social psychology began with research in the area of *group polarization* (he *cut his eye teeth in social psychology* in this area). At that time, he did not realize the powerful influence (both good and bad) that the social networking aspects of the Internet would have on the tendency for person-to-person (*face-to-face*) discussion to intensify (*amplify*) group members' preexisting opinions (*group polarization*). As Myers notes, *by linking and magnifying* (increasing) *the inclinations of like-minded people* (*kindred spirits*), *the Internet can be very, very bad, but also very, very good*.

Social Relations

Prejudice

In one 1970s study, most White participants who saw a White man shoving a Black man said they were “*horsing around*.” **Prejudice** involves beliefs, emotions, and tendencies to behave in certain ways. It is a form of prejudgment that influences (*colors*) how we interpret what we see. Thus, in an experiment in which White people saw a White man pushing a Black man, most interpreted the behavior as playful activity (“*horsing around*”). When the roles were reversed, the behavior was more likely to be described as aggressive or hostile (“*violent*”). Our perceptions affect what we pay attention to and how we explain or make sense of events.

(Close-Up: Automatic Prejudice) . . . explicit—on the radar screen of our awareness . . . implicit—below the radar, out of sight . . . While some thoughts are processed at a conscious level (*on the radar screen of our awareness*), more frequently our thoughts are unconsciously processed (they are *below the radar*). These unconscious (*implicit*) responses appear to be reflexive, much like the way our knee responds with a quick, automatic movement (*a knee-jerk response*) when our patellar tendon is tapped. Similarly, *prejudice* is often an automatic, unthinking attitude rather than a conscious (*explicit*) decision.

(Close-Up: Automatic Prejudice) . . . telltale signals . . . A close examination of our inner feelings sometimes reveals hidden prejudices. Researchers have detected bodily responses—facial muscle responses and activation of the amygdala—that seem to reflect implicit prejudice (*they give off telltale signals*) in people who consciously express little prejudice. But as Myers notes, it is not our inner feelings but what we *do* with them that is important.

Even *forming us-them groups by tossing a coin* creates this bias. One of the factors affecting prejudice is our tendency to define ourselves through identification with a particular group (*our ingroup bias*). This tendency in turn creates an **outgroup** of people who do not belong to our group (*the ingroup*). Even if the groups are artificially created by random assignment (*formed by tossing a coin*), we will tend to see our own group as more deserving, superior, and so on.

Prejudice springs not only from *the divisions of society* but also from *the passions of the heart*. Prejudice can arise from emotions we experience and feel deeply (*from the passions of the heart*), as well as from societal circumstances (*the divisions of society*). When things go wrong, we may feel anger, frustration, or aggression, and these feelings (*the heart's passions*) are often directed toward those perceived to be responsible (*scapegoat theory*). For example, negative **stereotypes** about particular ethnic groups developed rapidly (*blossomed*) after the events of 9/11 and some very angry (*outraged*) people violently attacked (*lashed out at*) innocent members of those groups. As Myers notes, *negative emotions nourish* (encourage) prejudice.

Aggression

For a gun to fire, the trigger must be pulled. With some people, as with *hair-trigger guns*, *it doesn't take much to trip an explosion*. A gun that can be fired with very gentle pressure on the trigger is called a *hair-trigger gun*. Some people tend to react with a sudden outburst of anger or hostility (*an explosion*) to even mild provocations. This is similar to the way that a *hair-trigger gun* will fire easily with a small amount of pressure on the trigger (*it doesn't take much to trip an explosion*).

A raging bull becomes a gentle *Ferdinand* when castration reduces its *testosterone* level. Biological explanations of **aggression** examine the influences of genes, clusters of neurons in the brain, and biochemical agents in the blood (for example, hormones and alcohol). Levels of the male sex hormone (*testosterone*) can be reduced by castration; thus, an aggressive, ferocious bull (*a raging bull*) can be reduced to a playful, friendly animal similar to the fictional character (*Ferdinand*) of children's stories.

Sexual scripts depicted in X-rated films are often toxic. Movies that censors restrict to adult audiences and deem unsuitable for younger people because of their explicitly sexual or violent content are given an *X-rating*. (R-rated slasher films, depicting mutilation, are similarly restricted because of their gory content). Repeatedly watching these films, even ones that are nonviolent, can lead to the misperception that sexual aggression is less serious and that a more lenient prison term for a rapist is appropriate. The culturally sanctioned and proscribed ways to behave (*social scripts*)

that are depicted in *X-rated films* and other similar media are called *sexual scripts*. Such *scripts* can poison and distort the way people think (*X-rated films are often toxic*).

Contrary to much popular opinion, viewing such *scenes* does not provide *an outlet for bottled-up impulses*. Laboratory studies have demonstrated that watching media that show sexual violence against women does not decrease the acceptance and performance of aggression against females. In contrast to what many believe, such portrayals or depictions (*scenes*) do not allow vicarious expression (*an outlet*) for pent-up hostile urges (*bottled-up impulses*). Instead, they may have the opposite effect.

Attraction

So, within certain limits, *familiarity breeds fondness* (Bornstein, 1989, 1999). Under some circumstances, the more often we see someone (become *familiar* with him or her), the more likely it is that we will grow to like that person (to become *fond* of him or her). This is called the **mere-exposure effect**. This effect suggests that the popular saying “*familiarity breeds contempt*” may not be completely accurate.

... “*beauty is only skin deep*” . . . This saying suggests that physical attractiveness (*beauty*) is only a superficial quality (*skin deep*). Research, however, has shown that how we look influences such things as our social interactions, how frequently we date, our popularity, and how we are perceived by others.

... *blind date* . . . When a social outing (*a date*) is arranged with a person you have never met or seen before, the meeting or get-together with that person is called a *blind date*. The person you go out with is also called your *blind date*. In one experiment, students were randomly matched in male and female pairs. These pairs then attended a dance where they talked and danced for more than two hours with their new partners (their *blind dates*). When they later appraised or evaluated their partners (*rated their dates*), the main factor that determined whether they liked each other was physical attractiveness. Both men and women liked good-looking *dates* best.

Beauty is in the eye of the culture. The old saying “*beauty is in the eye of the beholder*” suggests that our subjective perceptions are more important than objective measures when determining who is physically attractive and who is not. These perceptions are influenced by cultural values or ideals, which change over time (*beauty is in the eye of the culture*). For example, in the United States, the full-figured movie star idol of the 1950s (*the soft, voluptuous Marilyn Monroe ideal*) has given way to the more fit and athletic (*lean*) yet large-breasted (*busty*) celebrities of today.

... in real life, *opposites retract* (Rosenbaum, 1986). The old saying “*opposites attract*” has not been supported by social psychology research. In fact, we tend to dislike those we do not perceive as similar to ourselves (*opposites retract*). Compared with randomly paired people, friends and couples are far more likely to share attitudes, beliefs, and interests. We like those who are like us.

Birds that flock together usually are of a feather. The expression “*birds of a feather flock together*” implies that those who share such things as attitudes, beliefs, interests, religion, economic status, and intelligence will tend to associate with each other. Similarity, proximity and perceived attractiveness influence who we like and who likes us.

To experience a *stirred-up* state and to associate some of that feeling with a desirable person is to *experience the pull of passion*. Research has shown that one part of romantic or **passionate love** is physiological arousal; a second aspect is some cognitive interpretation and labeling of that feeling.

So, if a person is in an aroused (*stirred-up*) state, and if that state is easily linked to the presence of an attractive person, attributions of romantic love may be made (*you experience the pull of passion*). As Myers cheerfully notes, rather than absence, *adrenaline makes the heart grow fonder* (intensifies love).

Altruism

At each step, the presence of others can *turn people away from the path that leads to helping*. John Darley and Bibb Latané displayed their findings about the decision-making process in a flow diagram (see Figure 12.9). At each decision point—noticing the event, interpreting it as an emergency, assuming responsibility—the presence of others who appear to have observed the event (*bystanders*) causes people to be less likely to give assistance to someone in need (*they are turned away from the path that leads to helping*). When more people share responsibility for helping, the accountability for action gets dispersed and any single individual is less likely to help—a phenomenon called the **bystander effect**.

So *happiness breeds helpfulness*. But it's also true that *helpfulness breeds happiness*. Being in a cheerful state enhances the tendency to assist others (*happiness breeds helpfulness*). But it is also true that good feelings increase for those who assist others (*helpfulness breeds happiness*). Making charitable donations, for example, activates brain areas associated with reward, and people who give money away are happier than those who spend it almost exclusively on themselves.

Conflict and Peacemaking

Psychologists have noticed *a curious tendency*: People in conflict *form evil images of one another*. We have a strange propensity (*a curious tendency*) to perceive (*form images of*) our enemies in a very distorted manner, often categorizing them as cruel, untrustworthy, and malevolent (*evil*). They, of course, view us in the same way; each party in a **conflict** tends to perceive wicked, untrustworthy intentions in the other. These biased pictures we form of each other are called **mirror-image perceptions**.

... *tit for tat* . . . This means to repay a wrong or an injury suffered by inflicting equivalent, or more, harm on the person responsible. If you perceive or believe that a person is annoyed with you, you may ignore, slight, or rebuff (*snub*) that person (a *tit-for-tat* response). This could lead to the person actually getting annoyed at you and you now have evidence that justified your initial perception. In this way, *mirror-image perceptions* can lead to the results you expected and predicted (*perceptions can become self-fulfilling prophecies*) and can create (*feed*) a spiteful, malicious, reciprocal exchange of angry responses (*a vicious cycle of hostility*).

Before long, each group became intensely proud of itself and hostile to the other group's "sneaky," "smart-alecky stinkers." In Muzafer Sherif's experiment, competitive conditions were created to foster the formation of two antagonistic groups. Each group soon saw itself as superior to the other group, which it saw as "dishonest and sly" ("sneaky") "rotten know-it-alls" ("smart-alecky stinkers"). Sherif then used shared objectives and common problems (*superordinate goals*) to create reconciliation and cooperation.