

## ***FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE***

### **Social Thinking**

#### *The Fundamental Attribution Error*

A partner must decide whether a loved one's *tart-tongued remark* reflects a *bad day* or a *mean disposition*. 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 (*tart-tongued remark*) is due to a cruel personality (*a mean disposition*) or the result of some situational influence, such as a stressful day at work (*a bad day*).

. . . *freeloaders*. This term refers to people who voluntarily live off other people. Those who believe that people are poor and/or unemployed because of personal dispositions tend to underestimate the influence of situational variables. Thus, they might call someone on welfare a *freeloader* rather than simply a victim of circumstances.

*Better to drain the swamps than swat the mosquitoes*. The idea here is that it is better to attack the source of a problem, rather than its effects. Eliminating insect breeding grounds (*draining the swamps*) is more productive than trying to kill the insects (*swatting the mosquitoes*) after they have hatched. Similarly, when explaining poverty or unemployment, those who tend to blame the situation, rather than individual personality traits, are likely to suggest changing the circumstances that give rise to poverty, unemployment, terrorism, and so on.

#### *Attitudes and Actions*

Not only will people *stand up for* what they believe, they also will believe more strongly 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. Many lines (*streams*) of evidence confirm the principle that beliefs can be changed to correspond with people's actions (*attitudes follow behavior*).

. . . "*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**, whereby a person is first coerced to agree to a small request, then to comply with a much larger request. Frequently, people will change their attitudes so that they are consistent with their new behavior (*doing becomes believing*).

After this "*foot in the door*" *step*, he stood guard inside. Someone selling products by going house to house (a door-to-door salesperson, for example) might be able to talk about a product a little bit longer if he were to put his foot in the doorway and prevent the resident from closing the door in his face. So, "*getting your foot in the door*" means that you get a chance to compete, or be heard, or do whatever it is you are attempting to do. In experiments, when researchers got people to commit to a small favor (*they got a foot in the door*), those people were much more likely to agree to a larger request. This is called the **foot-in-the-door phenomenon**. In real life, in the early 1970s, the Greek military government used this approach to gradually train people to assume the **role** of torturer (*it eased men into their roles*). After standing guard outside the torture chamber (the initial "*foot-in-the-door*" *step*), the guard was asked to come inside the interrogation room. After that, he was led to become more actively involved in the actual questioning and torture. As Myers notes, *what we do, we gradually become*.

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 (*succumb*) to the situation, while others do not.

*The attitudes-follow-behavior principle* has a *heartening implication* . . . When our attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent, we feel a certain amount of tension (*cognitive dissonance*) and we 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 notion that feelings follow actions (*the attitudes-follow-behavior principle*) has positive ramifications (*heartening implications*).

## **Social Influence**

### *Conformity: Complying With Social Pressures*

*Fish swim in schools. Birds fly in flocks.* Many animals congregate 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*). We often, without conscious awareness, imitate and copy the actions, emotional expressions, verbal intonations, and attitudes of other members of our particular reference group (*we are natural mimics*). The tendency to automatically transmit behavioral patterns from one person to another is called the *chameleon effect* and helps us to *empathize*, to feel what others feel (*behavior is contagious*).

### *Obedience: Following Orders*

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 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” whenever they made mistakes on a memory task. A majority of the participants complied with the experimenter’s request.

You *draw back*, but the stern 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.”

With *kindness and obedience on a collision course*, obedience usually won. Milgram’s research on obedience showed that the social factors that foster conformity are powerful enough to make almost any one of us behave in ways inconsistent with our beliefs. When participants were in a 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.

Milgram did not entrap his *teachers* by asking them first to *zap* learners with *enough electricity to make their hair stand on end*. Milgram used the *foot-in-the-door* tactic to persuade participants (*teachers*) to comply with his requests to shock (*zap*) the learners with larger and larger voltages of electricity (*enough electricity to make their hair stand on end*). First, he started by asking the teacher to use a small amount (*a little tickle*) of electricity on the learner. Later, after obtaining compliance (*obedience*), he asked them to increase the level, and so on. Participants tended to rationalize their behavior—for some, their attitudes became consistent with their behavior over the course of the experiment.

*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 anyone (*ordinary people*) can be led to behave badly given the right—or wrong—circumstances (*they can be corrupted by an evil situation*).

### *Group Behavior*

In a team *tug-of-war*, for example, do you suppose your effort would be more than, less than, or the same as the effort you would *exert* 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 the term “*to loaf*” means to *work less hard*, to *slack off*, to take it easy, or to *free-ride*.)

Although 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’s 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 discussion to intensify (*amplify*) group members’ preexisting opinions (*group polarization*). As Myers notes, *by linking and magnifying* (increasing) *the inclinations of like-minded people, the Internet can be very, very, bad, but also very, very good*.

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 (*hold firmly to their position*) and do not appear to be uncertain or unsure (*waffle*).

## **Social Relations**

### *Prejudice*

(*Close-Up: Automatic Prejudice*) . . . *explicit—on the radar screen of our awareness* . . . *implicit—below the radar* . . . 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*) . . . *gut check* . . . A close examination of our inner feelings (a *gut check* or a check of our gut feelings) sometimes reveals covert 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 arbitrarily *creating us-them groups by tossing a coin* creates this bias. One of the factors affecting prejudice is our propensity to define ourselves through identification with a particular group (*ingroup bias*). This propensity 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 (*created with the toss of 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 after the events of 9/11, and some very angry (*outraged*) people violently attacked (*lashed out at*) innocent members of these groups. Even 10 years later, anti-Muslim hostilities (*animosities*) still erupted (*flared*) with mosque burnings and efforts to block the construction of an Islamic community center near the site where the World Trade Towers once stood (*near Ground Zero*).

### *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* will become 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.

. . . *X-rated films* . . . 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. In addition, films depicting mutilation (*slasher films*) might be given an R-rating in extreme cases. Repeatedly watching these films, even ones that are nonviolent, can lead to the misperception that a woman's friendliness is sexual, that sexual aggression is less serious, that a more lenient prison term for a rapist is appropriate, that one's partner is less attractive, and that extramarital sex is less troubling.

Contrary to much popular opinion, viewing such *depictions* 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 (*depictions*) do not allow vicarious expression (*an outlet*) for pent-up hostile urges (*bottled-up impulses*). Instead, they may have the opposite effect.

As Myers points out, we do *not* feel better when we openly express (*vent*) our emotions and display anger and hostility (“*blow off steam*”).

### *Attraction*

So, within certain limits, *familiarity breeds fondness* (Bornstein, 1989, 1999). Under some circumstances, the more often we see someone (become *familiar* with him), the more likely it is that we will grow to like that person (to become *fond* of him). 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 an experiment, after students were randomly put into male and female pairs, they 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 very slim female figure of the 1920s (*the ultra-thin ideal of the Roaring Twenties*) was replaced by the full-figured movie star idol of the 1950s (*the soft, voluptuous Marilyn Monroe ideal*), which in turn has been replaced by the more fit and athletic (*lean*), yet large-breasted (*busty*), stars 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*). Rather than fostering contempt, Myers humorously suggests that *similarity breeds content*.

To be *revved up* and to associate some of that arousal with a desirable person is *to feel the pull of passion*. Research has shown that one component 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 (*revved up*) state, and if the arousal is easily linked to the presence of an attractive person, then attributions of romantic love may be made (*to feel 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 us away from the path that leads to helping*. Darley and Latané displayed their findings in a flow diagram (see Figure 14.17). 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*).

## *Conflict and Peacemaking*

Psychologists have noted that those in conflict have *a curious tendency to form diabolical images of one another*. We have a strange propensity (*curious tendency*) to perceive (*to form images of*) our enemies in a very distorted manner, often categorizing them as evil, cruel, untrustworthy, and devilish (*diabolical*). They, of course, view us in the same way, and each party in the conflict tends to perceive evil or wickedness in the other (*each demonizes 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 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), which could lead to the person actually getting annoyed at you. 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 become self-fulfilling prophecies*).

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's "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.

. . . small *conciliatory* gestures . . . have allowed both parties to begin edging *down the tension ladder to a safer rung* where communication and mutual understanding can begin (Lindsfold et al., 1978, 1988). Social psychologist Charles Osgood has developed a tactic called **GRIT** (*Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension-Reduction*) for increasing cooperation and trust between parties in conflict. When one side makes a small gesture or offer of goodwill (a *conciliatory* act), the other side has the opportunity to reciprocate. Thus the conflict moves toward some resolution (*down the tension ladder to a safer rung*) and the process of mutual respect and understanding begins.