

Psy 202: Chapter 12 Social Psychology

Abu Ghraib: normal ppl caught up in overwhelming situations that shape their actions... a number of situational elements are likely to have influenced the guard's behavior

How do we form our impressions of others?

- When ppl act rude or mean, we assume that they are rude and mean... we do not assess how much power the situation had in shaping the behavior
- Our regular interactions with others shape who we are and how we understand the world
- Social psych is concerned with how ppl influence other ppl's thoughts, feelings and actions
- Because almost every human activity has a social dimension, research in social psych covers expansive and varied territory; how we perceive and understand others, how we function in groups, why we hurt or help ppl, why we fall in love, why we stigmatize or discriminate against certain ppl
- Research reveals that humans are not inherently flawed or evil... they are distinct individuals who are powerfully influenced by social context
- Over the course of human evolution, one fact has remained constant: because we are social animals, we live in groups... groups provide security from predators and from competing groups
- Provide mating opportunities, assistance in hunting food and gathering it while at the same time, members within a group may compete for food and for mates
- Evolved for distinguishing members of one's own group from members of other groups as well as detecting dangers from within the group, such as deception, coercion and infidelity
- We constantly are required to make social judgments
- Assess whether ppl are honest or dishonest, trustworthy or unreliable and so on
- Classify ppl into social categories and doing so can have major implications on how we treat them
- Our long term evaluations of ppl are heavily influenced by our first impressions

Nonverbal actions and expressions effect our first impressions:

- How you initially feel when someone walks towards you will be determined mostly by the person's nonverbal behavior
- **Nonverbal Behavior:** the facial expression, gestures, mannerisms and movements by which one communicates with others
- Nalini Ambady and Robert Rosenthal found that ppl can make accurate judgments based on only a few seconds of observation... they refer to such quick views as "thin slices of behavior" ... they are powerful cues for impression formation
- EX: judges, perhaps unconsciously, may indicate their beliefs about guilt or innocence through facial expressions, tones of voice and gestures
- Important nonverbal cue is how ppl walk, known as gait
- Gait provides info about affective state
- EX: ppl with bounce in their step, swinging arms are seen as happy... ppl who scurry along, take short steps and are stooped over are perceived as hostile and those taking long strides with heavy steps are perceived as angry

Facial Expressions:

- The first thing we notice about another person is usually their face... newborns prefer to look at human faces rather than the outline
- The face communicates info such as emotion, interest and distrust... EX: ppl use their eyes to indicate anger, flirting or to catch others attention
- Eye contact is important in social situations however, it's perceived differently in different cultures
- EX: Western countries tend to seek eye contact when they speak to someone however, Native American tribes think that direct eye contact, especially with the elders, is considered disrespectful

We make attributions about others:

- We constantly try to explain other ppl's motives, traits and preference
- Attributions: ppl's explanations for why events or actions occur
- We are motivated to draw inferences in part by a basic need for both order and predictability
- We prefer to think that things happen for a reason and that therefore we can anticipate future events
- Sometimes a violent act, such as rape or murder, appears to be senseless
- Ppl often make attributions about the victim, such as "she deserved it" or "he provoked it"
- Attributions of this kind are part of the just world hypothesis
- This hypothesis, victims must have done something to justify what happened to them
- Such attributions make the mistreatment seem more understandable and more justified
- They make the world seem safer and saner

Attribution dimensions:

- In any situation, there are dozens of plausible explanations for specific outcomes
- Fritz Heider, the originator of the attribution theory, drew an essential distinction between two types of attribution
- **Personal attribution:** explanations that refer to ppl's internal characteristics, such as abilities, traits, moods or efforts (known as internal or dispositional attributions)
- **Situational attribution:** explanations that refer to external events, such as the weather, luck, accidents or other ppl's actions (known as external attribution)
- Attributions can vary on other dimensions (EX: attributions can be stable over time (permanent) or unstable (temporary) and they can be controllable or uncontrollable)

Attributions about the self:

- In making attributions about our own behavior, we tend to have a self-serving bias
- We attribute our failures to situational, unstable or uncontrollable factors in a way that casts us in a positive light
- We attribute our failures to temporary aspects of situations that are not our fault
- We also attribute our success to personal, permanent factors in a way that gives us credit for doing well
- EX: if you fail a test, you may blame your poor performance on not getting enough sleep or your teacher's teaching skills but if you do well on a test, you may attribute that good performance on you being smart
- Weiner's theory has been used to explain psychological states such as depression... ppl suffering from depression attribute their failures to their own incompetence
- They believe their incompetence is permanent

Attributional bias:

- When explaining other ppl's behaviors, we tend to overemphasize the importance of personality traits and underestimate the importance of situation
- **Fundamental attribution error:** see description above
- Ppl are described as intuitive scientists who try to draw inferences about others and make attributions about events
- Ppl tend to be systematically biased when they process social info
- They make self-serving attributions that are consistent with their preexisting beliefs and they generally fail to take into account that other people are influenced by social circumstances
- Edward Jones originated the idea of the fundamental attribution error and called it the correspondence bias to emphasize our tendency to expect the behaviors of others to correspond with our own beliefs and personalities
- In contrast, Jones, when we make attributions about ourselves, we tend to focus on situations rather than on our personal dispositions
- This error, in conjunction with the fundamental attribution error, leads to the actor/observer discrepancy ... this term refers to two tendencies... when interpreting our own behavior, we tend to focus on

dispositions (we tend to attribute our own lateness to external factors like traffic... on the other hand, we tend to attribute other ppl's lateness to personal characteristics, like laziness or lack of organization

- We most often fall prey to the actor/observer discrepancy when we are interpreting negative events
- When things go wrong for us, we are most likely to attribute the result to outside forces... then things go wrong for other ppl, we are most likely to attribute the result to the person's dispositions
- Ppl in Eastern cultures tend to be more holistic in how they perceive the world... they see a forest instead of individual trees
- Ppl in Eastern cultures use much more info when making attributions than do ppl in Western cultures
- They are more likely to believe that human behavior is the outcome of both personal and situational factors
- Although Eastern cultures are more likely than westerners to take situational forces into account, they still tend to favor personal info over situational info when making attributions about others
- In interpreting behavior, cultures tend not to differ in whether they emphasize personal factors...cultures differ in how much they emphasize the situation

Stereotypes are based on automatic categorization:

- We hold beliefs about groups because they allow us to answer these sorts of questions quickly
- Stereotypes: cognitive schemas that help us organize info about ppl on the basis of their membership in certain groups
- Mental shortcuts are forms of heuristic thinking: they enable us to make quick decisions
- Stereotypes are mental shortcuts that allow for easy, fast processing of social info
- Stereotypes occur automatically and in most cases, outside of our awareness
- Stereotypes are neutral, they simply reflect efficient cognitive processes
- We construct and use categories of this kind for two basic reasons... to streamline our formation of impressions and to deal with the limitations inherent in mental processing
- Because of limited mental resources, we cannot scrutinize every person we encounter
- Rather than consider each person as unique and unpredictable, we categorize ppl as belonging to particular groups
- We hold knowledge about the groups in long term memory
- We might automatically categorize others on the basis of clothing... we have beliefs about the others based on stereotypes about the particular categories
- Stereotypes affect the formation of impressions
- Once we form stereotypes, we maintain them by a number of processes
- As schematic structures, stereotypes guide attention toward info that confirms the stereotypes and away from disconfirming evidence
- Our memories are also biased to match stereotypes
- These biases lead to illusory correlations in which we believe that relationships exist when they do not
- One type of behavior might be perceived in different ways so it is consistent with a stereotype
- When we encounter someone who does not fit a stereotype, we put that person in a special category rather than alter that stereotype... this is called subtyping
- EX: a racist that thinks blacks are lazy may subcategorize Obama or Beyoncé as an exception

Self-fulfilling effects:

- Stereotypes that are initially untrue can become true
- **Self-Fulfilling prophecy:** ppl's tendency to behave in ways that confirm their own expectations or other ppl's expectations
- Case study: Bloomer's IQ increases seem to have resulted from the extra attention and encouragement provided by the teachers... the teacher's expectations turned into reality
- Negative stereotypes can become self-fulfilling as well