

Psych Reading for Week of March 25th

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What is Social Psychology?

- Social psychology helps us to understand why many forms of social influence are so powerful
- Social Psychology- The study of how people influence others' behavior, beliefs, and attitudes.
- Humans as a social species
 - We gravitate to each other
 - We feel the need to belong
 - Need to Belong Theory- We humans have a biologically based need for interpersonal connections
- Conformity, obedience, and many other forms of social influence become maladaptive only when they're blind or unquestioning.
- Social Comparison Theory- We evaluate our abilities and beliefs by comparing them with those of others.
 - Upward- We compare ourselves with people who seem superior to us in some way
 - Downward- We compare ourselves with others who seem inferior to us in some way.
- Social Contagion
 - Mass Hysteria- A contagious outbreak of irrational behavior that spreads much like a flu epidemic.
 - Collective Delusions- Many people simultaneously come to be convinced of bizarre things that are false
- Urban Legends – False stories repeated so many times that people believe them to be true
- Social Facilitation- The presence of others can make us perform better.
- Social Disruption- The worsening of performance in the presence of others.

The Fundamental Attribution Error: The Great Lesson of Social Psychology

- Attributions- Assigning causes to behavior
- Fundamental Attribution Error- The tendency to overestimate the impact of dispositional influences (personality traits, attitudes, intelligence) on others' behaviors.

Social Influence: Conformity and Obedience

- Conformity- The tendency of people to alter their behavior as a result of group pressure.
- Asch studies found that conformity was influenced by the following independent variables:
 - Unanimity- If all confederates gave the wrong answer, the participant was more likely to conform.
 - Difference in the wrong answer- Knowing that someone else in the group differed from the majority made the participant less likely to conform.
 - Size- The size of the majority made a difference.

- Deindividuation- The tendency of people to engage in atypical behavior when stripped of their usual identities.
- A loss of identity actually makes people more likely to engage in prosocial, or helping, behavior when others are helping out.
- Groupthink- An emphasis on group unanimity at the expense of critical thinking.
- When groups combine information from members, they typically rely on “common knowledge”-information that group members share
- The best way to avoid groupthink is to encourage active dissent within an organization.
- Group Polarization- Occurs when group discussion strengthens the dominant position held by individual group members.
- Groupthink can lead to cults, groups that exhibit intense and unquestioning devotion to a single cause.
- Cults promote groupthink in four different ways:
 - Having a persuasive leader
 - Disconnecting group members from the outside world
 - Discouraging questioning of the group’s assumptions
 - Establishing training practices that gradually indoctrinate members
- Inoculation Effect- First expose people to information consistent with cult beliefs, and then debunk it.

Obedience: The Psychology of Following Orders

- Obedience- We take our marching orders from people who are above us in the hierarchy of authority.

Helping and Harming Others: Prosocial Behavior and Aggression

- Mounting evidence suggests that human nature is a blend of both socially constructive and destructive tendencies.
- Prosocial Behavior- Behavior intended to help others.
- Causes of Bystander Nonintervention
 - Pluralistic Ignorance- the error of assuming that no one in the group perceives things as we do.
 - Diffusion of Responsibility- The presence of others makes each person feel less responsible for the outcome.
- Social Loafing- A phenomenon in which people slack off in groups.

Prosocial Behavior and Altruism

- Altruism- Helping others for unselfish reasons
- Some people do help in situations in which others may not
- Enlightenment Effect- Exposure to research on bystander effects may increase the chances of intervening in emergencies.
- Participants who are less concerned about social approval and less traditional are more likely to go against the grain and intervene in emergencies even when others are present.

- Extroverted people are more likely to help than introverted people.

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Attitudes and Persuasion: Changing Minds

- Belief- A conclusion regarding factual evidence
- Attitude- A belief that includes an emotional component.
- Attitudes are highly accessible, meaning they come to mind easily.
- Self-Monitoring- A trait that assesses the extent to which people's behaviors reflect their true feelings and attitudes.

Origins of Attitudes

- Our experiences shape our attitudes.
- Recognition Heuristic- Makes us more likely to believe something we've heard many times.
- Bandwagon Fallacy- We'll remember that we shouldn't believe something merely because most people do.
- Our attitudes are associated in important ways with our personality traits.
- Cognitive Dissonance Theory- We alter our attitudes because we experience an unpleasant state of tension between two or more conflicting thoughts.
- We can reduce the anxiety resulting from this inconsistency in three major ways:
 - Change cognition A
 - Change cognition B
 - Introduce a new cognition C
- Two other explanations for cognitive dissonance effects:
 - Self-Perception Theory- Proposes that we acquire our attitudes by observing our behaviors
 - Impression Management Theory- Proposes that we don't really change our attitudes in cognitive dissonance studies, we only tell the experimenters we have.

Persuasion: Humans as Salespeople

- Dual Process Models of Persuasion- There are two alternative pathways to persuading others:
 - Central Route- Leads us to evaluate the merits of persuasive arguments carefully and thoughtfully
 - Peripheral Route- Leads us to respond to persuasive arguments on the basis of snap judgments.
- Persuasion Techniques
 - Foot-in-the-door Technique- Suggests that we start with a small request before making a bigger one.
 - Door-in-the-face Technique- Start with a large request before asking for a small one.
 - Low-Ball Technique- Seller of a product starts by quoting a price well below the actual sales price.