

College Guild
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What's On Your Mind?

Unit 3 of 6

~ Social Psychology ~

Social psychology is the study of individual behavior, attitudes, and thoughts and how they are influenced by the presence of others. It is unique in that it concerns the interaction of minds, rather than a single mind. Through social psychology, we can determine better ways of navigating conflict, dealing with prejudice, and breaking down social barriers.

There are two main focuses of social psychology: the perception of the self as a social being, and interactions with others. Social psychology focuses on both nature and nurture, depending on the context. In the context of self-perception, nature plays a larger role — it is believed that each individual is born with a certain temperament. In the context of interactions with others, nurture typically plays a larger role.

Communication

Imagine you are having lunch with a friend. You take a bite of your sandwich and as you are looking at it, you hear a squish and look down to find half of a worm in your sandwich — the other half is in your mouth.

1. Before continuing to read, write down what your reaction would be to taking a bite of a worm sandwich.

Likely, you will spit out the bite of sandwich, make a face, and probably say something like “Yuck! That’s disgusting” (or something much worse). If this is the case, based on your body language, your friend eating with you already knows that there is something wrong with the sandwich before you say “That’s disgusting.” Your nonverbal cues (spitting out the sandwich and making a face) communicate to your friend that you are disgusted without you having to say it out loud. Therefore, your friend collects most of the communication through your body movement and reaction, barely needing the words “That’s disgusting” to figure out what is going on.

A large piece of what we study in social psychology is communication. However, “communication” does not simply refer to the words that we exchange with another individual. In 1971, Albert Mehrabian published his book *Silent Messages* in which he asserted that only 7% of any message we are trying to deliver or receive is communicated verbally (through words)! A huge 38% is communicated through tone of voice, while 55% is transmitted through nonverbal cues (facial expressions, body language).

2. Pick one of the faces to the right and write a story about what emotion it is expressing and why you think so.

Outside of prisons, more and more people are communicating via texting (short messages sent between mobile phones). In addition to our words, we often add emoji (the faces at right) or abbreviations to communicate our emotions. In a face-to-face conversation, you would not typically say “lol” (laughing out loud) to communicate to someone that you find what they are saying to be funny; you would simply laugh. But through text, we lack the ability to gather information through someone’s body language, which leads to us describing our reactions by typing something like “lol.”



3. Describe an interaction between two people without using any dialogue. How are they carrying themselves? What are they feeling? What emotions are they expressing?

4. Give two examples of situations where words are *required* to communicate effectively.

Prejudice

Prejudice can be defined as an unfair and incorrect negative perception of an individual that occurs because of their belonging in a specific social group. It is necessary to differentiate prejudice and discrimination. Discrimination is the negative behavior and actions taken against a group or individual based on their connection to a certain social group. Prejudice is a mindset; discrimination is how we express it.



5. Describe a time when you have felt prejudice toward someone but did not act on it.

For example, let's imagine an individual is the supervising manager at a factory and manages many older individuals working on the production line. Based on having a grandfather who is disabled and in a nursing home, the manager feels that all older citizens are helpless and slow. Therefore, the manager thinks that the older workers are less capable of doing their job. This *attitude* reflects prejudice. Now imagine the manager decides to act on their prejudice and fire all of the staff over 50 years of age, replacing them with a younger workforce that they believe will be more productive. This *action* reflects discrimination.

6. Write a letter from the perspective of one of the older factory workers to the manager who fired them.

Stereotyping

Think back to the discussion about nature v. nurture in the first unit. Prejudice is an interesting concept to apply to nature v. nurture because no one is *born* prejudiced towards certain groups. Rather, we are all born only with the mental tools to categorize people and to recognize the differences between genders and races. We notice these differences from a very early age and begin to differentiate between groups of people, which can lead us to stereotype them. A stereotype is a fixed and oversimplified idea about a person or group of people that is a product of our social influences. As humans, we stereotype and categorize everything — from gender and race, to non-living objects. For example, when someone says the word “pencil,” we usually think of the basic yellow lead pencil with a pink eraser, not a pencil like the one to the right. Stereotyping often causes us to have narrow views of people and their intentions, which can lead to conflict.



7. Under what conditions do you think a child is most likely to transform their stereotypes into prejudices?

8. How is stereotyping an object different from stereotyping a person?

9. Give an example of when you were stereotyped. How did it feel? How did you react and what was the result?

Conflict

Prejudice and stereotypes are two main sources of conflict in the modern world. Prejudice and stereotypes often lead us to believe that we know more about another’s experiences and intentions than we actually do, when each individual is actually quite different from every other.

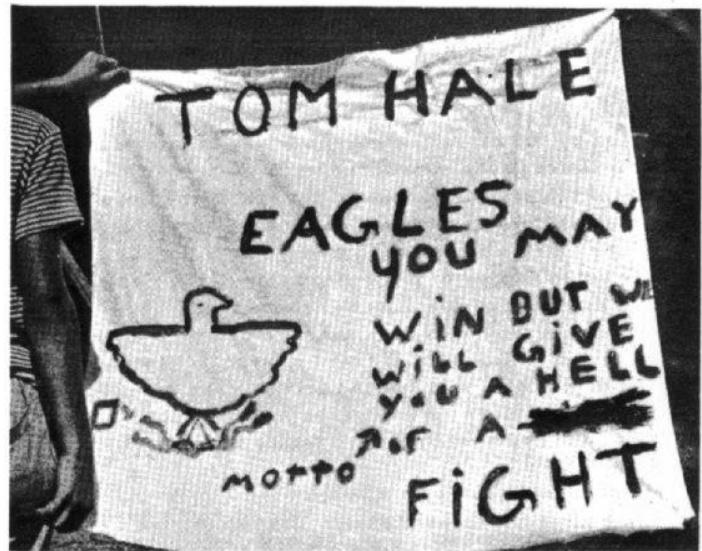
Muzafer Sherif is famous for developing Realistic Conflict Theory to explain why stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination often result in conflict between social groups. The theory suggests that the source of conflict between these groups is the presence of a limited resource that each group needs or wants. According to this theory, people might respond with prejudice when they feel that their share of a limited resource is threatened by another social group. It is important to keep in mind that we are not only talking about material resources such as money or land, but also abstract resources like power and education.

10. List two resources that are material and two resources that are abstract, either in or out of prison.

11. What kinds of resources do you think are the most likely to cause conflict when they are limited?

Sherif's experiment, the Robber's Cave Experiment, is one of the most well-known social psychology studies to date. The experiment started with 22 young boys who did not know each other before the experiment, and took place in a summer camp setting. All boys were of the same race and socioeconomic status. Before the start of the experiment, the 22 boys were split into two groups of 11 boys. For a week, the two groups were kept separate from each other to allow the boys to bond. Each group gave themselves a team name: the Eagles and the Rattlers. Then, the two different groups were introduced to each other and the researchers created environments that would encourage competition between them. The researchers facilitated games such as baseball and tug of war for the two groups to compete for a trophy (the "limited resource"). Prejudices were formed toward the other group based on them being considered "others."

At first, prejudice was only expressed in the form of name-calling, but it quickly developed into more aggressive tactics such as ransacking each other's cabins. When the behavior became too aggressive, the researchers stepped in to separate the groups for two days to let tensions settle. During the two days, the boys described their perception of each group to the researchers, always describing their in-group positively and the out-group negatively, despite the fact that there were no distinctive differences between the groups. For example, a boy on the Eagles' team thought very highly of the Eagles and thought that the boys on the Rattler's team were generally worse people.



12. How do you think the boys' perception of their in-group would change in the absence of an out-group?

In the third week of the Robber's Cave Experiment, the researchers simulated a water crisis in which they told both groups that a vandal had cut off their water supply. The problem required both of the groups that previously hated each other to work *together*. At the

end of the third week after working together, when the boys were asked again what their views of the competing group were, the results had improved dramatically. Therefore, the study helped to support the idea that forcing groups to work together rather than pitting them against each other was the best way to break down discrimination and prejudice. *Although the results of the Robber's Cave experiment are*

valuable to the study of social psychology, it is worth pointing out that the design of this study was ethically flawed. The boys were not aware of the purpose of the study and were not protected from harm.

13. Write an essay about the findings of this experiment, expressing your opinion about it.

14. Do you think that these findings could be applied to real-world examples? Explain your answer.

Helping

Now that we've briefly covered a few causes of conflict, you're probably wondering what motivates us to help people. Motivations are our reasons for doing things. There are two different types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. *Intrinsic motivation* is doing something because we find it personally rewarding, while *extrinsic motivation* is doing something because we associate it with external rewards. Most people have intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for helping. In the table below, we will use the following example:

You are at the grocery store and the person paying in front of you is \$5 short and you happen to have an extra \$5 in your wallet. These are intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that might cause you to give the stranger in front of you \$5:

| Intrinsic motivators | | Extrinsic motivators | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Concept | Example | Concept | Example |
| <i>Reciprocity: The expectation that, if you help, someone will return the favor.</i> | You might give the stranger money in hopes that someone will give you money in return someday. | <i>Empathy-Altruism Theory: Altruism is the idea that we can help others without expecting anything in return. Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of another.</i> | You might give the money to the stranger simply because you think it's the right thing to do, or because you have experienced their same struggle/relate to how they are feeling and want to relieve their stress. |
| <i>Cost Reward Theory: When we see someone in a situation where they need help, we often feel distressed and help out to relieve these feelings.</i> | You might give the stranger money because watching them struggle makes you uncomfortable and you want to relieve yourself of that discomfort. | <i>Norm of social responsibility: The idea that we are all responsible for contributing to society in whatever way we are capable.</i> | You might give the money to the stranger because you feel that your place in society makes you responsible for helping in any way you can. |

15. Which of these motivators do you think is the strongest among most people? Explain.

16. What are some motivators that cause you to help people?

The Altruism Debate

There's a debate in psychology about whether or not a human can perform a good deed that is truly altruistic — meaning, without any true benefit to the individual performing the good deed. For example, you could say that someone who volunteers at a homeless shelter is being altruistic because they are not being paid and are giving up their own time to help people. However, although there is no material gain, one could argue that the volunteer is benefitting because it makes them *feel good* after they have helped.

17. Do you think we should care if someone doing a good deed benefits from it by feeling good afterwards? Why or why not?

18. Write about a time when someone did a good deed/favor for you. How did it make you feel?

Glossary

Abstract: Existing in thought or as an idea, not in physical reality.

Altruism: The belief in or practice of *selfless* concern for the well-being of others.

Resources

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-words/201109/is-nonverbal-communication-numbers-game>
- <https://www.simplypsychology.org/robbers-cave.html>
- <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/introduction-to-social-psychology/>
- https://www.dowellwebtools.com/tools/lp/Bo/psyched/15/Robbers_Cave_Experiment
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201203/does-true-altruism-exist>
- <https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/helping-others/>
- <https://www.deviantart.com/jjisthyname/art/Pencil-Joke-326757540>

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes