

# 18. Social Psychology: Cognition

## Objectives

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- Explain various aspects of social psychology
- Describe ways in which people develop self-concepts
- Describe the role of schemas in interactions with others
- Explain attribution theory and the development of bias
- Define attitudes and describe how they develop

## Vocabulary

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attitudes	personal identity	self-fulfilling prophecy	social identity
attribution theory	prejudice	self-schemas	social psychology
cognitive dissonance	reference groups	social comparison	stereotype
discrimination			

## Background

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Like most other people, students are largely unaware of how they develop ways of viewing others and themselves. Social psychology provides insights into the influence others have on us and that we have on ourselves. Becoming aware of how we are affected by sometimes-faulty ways of perceiving others and ourselves can help us develop a healthier viewpoint.

Students begin by learning the definition of social psychology and then consider the self and the idea of social interaction and the role of others in self-concept. As they review the development of self-concept, students learn about self-schemas, reference groups, social comparisons, and social identity.

Students next consider the question of how humans perceive each other and how they use schemas to structure their perceptions of events, make predictions, and decide on goals and plans. They explore the psychological mechanics of the all-important first impression as well as the sometimes damaging effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Students move on to discuss attribution theory, or the tendency of people to explain the behavior of

others in terms of a person's personality traits or external factors. Students benefit from a detailed discussion of how a person makes attributions, and other factors that contribute to attributions. Information about attribution bias helps to shed light on how false attributions can lead to an unfair bias.

Finally, students consider attitudes and how they change. They examine ways in which people use social schemas to develop attitudes in terms of using stereotypes, the effects of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and overcoming prejudice. The chapter closes with consideration of the dynamics of interpersonal attraction and what people find physically attractive.

### Further Resources

- Hall, Calvin S. *A Primer of Freudian Psychology*. New York: NAL-Dutton, 1955.
- Liebert, R. and M. Spiegler. *Personality: Strategies and Issues*. New York: Brooks-Cole, 1990.

## For Discussion

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### Review

1. What is social psychology and how does it differ from sociology?
2. Explain the concept of social comparison and its two main functions.
3. What are schemas and how do they change with an individual's experience?
4. What is attribution theory? How does it affect the way we view negative behaviors in others and ourselves?

### Critical Thinking

1. Do you agree with the theorists who suggest that there is no self without others? Explain your answer.
2. Describe your social schemas—are they more positive or negative? How do you think they affect your interpretation of social situations?
3. In terms of first impressions, what are some of the positive attributes that you find appealing? What negative factors make a bad impression? Explain.
4. Why do you think that women or men may be biased against their own gender in some cases? Why do you think their intelligence or talent might be attributed to external factors?
5. Explain how others have affected you by using a positive and a negative stereotype.

## Activities

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### 1. Positive Attributes

Have students break into groups, each with a piece of paper. Have each student list his or her five best attributes in order of importance on a piece of paper. Then ask the group to contribute their view of the student's five best attributes. Compare the resulting lists.

### 2. First Impressions

Have students pair off with another student or a person they don't know. Allow the students to talk for four minutes and then write their first impressions of each other. Have them discuss the validity of their judgments with the class.

### 3. Internet: Fighting Prejudice

Have each student use search engines to find and report on a Web site devoted to fighting some form of prejudice. Ask them to report their findings.

### 4. Special Sources: Primary Sources

Have students use the library to find a historical case of scapegoating, i.e., when a group has wrongly blamed someone for a negative occurrence.

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As you read Chapter 18, write an answer to each question below.

1. Explain the three purposes of comparison.

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2. How might a person with a high social identity and low personal identity behave? How might a person with a low social identity and high personal identity behave?

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3. What are the four mechanisms we use to protect our positive views of ourselves?

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4. What are the five causes of prejudice?

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5. What are the four factors in how attitudes develop?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. This term describes the sense one has of oneself as different from others.
  - a. personal sense
  - b. personal identity
  - c. self-differentiation
  - d. stereotype
2. Which term describes the cognitive structures that allow us to differentiate ourselves from others?
  - a. self identity
  - b. social identity
  - c. discrimination
  - d. self-schemas
3. Which term means beliefs and feelings about people, objects, or events that cause us to behave in certain ways?
  - a. attitudes
  - b. viewpoints
  - c. outlooks
  - d. perceptions
4. Which term means unfair treatment of individuals because they are members of a particular group?
  - a. disdain
  - b. reciprocity
  - c. discrimination
  - d. dissonance
5. Which theory holds that we tend to explain behavior in terms of internal personality traits or external factors?
  - a. explanation theory
  - b. behavioral theory
  - c. attribution theory
  - d. stereotype theory
6. Which word means an unfounded and generally negative attitude toward a group of people?
  - a. attribution
  - b. scapegoating
  - c. proximity
  - d. prejudice
7. Which term means people or groups of people whose opinions we care about?
  - a. reference groups
  - b. referral groups
  - c. influential groups
  - d. example groups
8. An expectation that is met is a result of this.
  - a. self-centered identity
  - b. expectation-fulfillment
  - c. self-fulfilling expectancy
  - d. self-fulfilling prophecy
9. What emotional state results when a person's attitude and behavior are not consistent?
  - a. cognitive dissonance
  - b. cognitive recognition
  - c. attitude adjustment
  - d. behavioral inconsistency
10. Which term refers to comparing of ourselves to others to learn the typical values and behaviors of a group and to determine how we differ from the group?
  - a. differentiation
  - b. group positioning
  - c. social comparison
  - d. other orientation

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. The term \_\_\_\_\_ refers to what we perceive ourselves to be.
  - a. esteem
  - b. self
  - c. attribute
  - d. schema
2. Shweder believed that our \_\_\_\_\_ provides answers to many core self-knowledge questions.
  - a. perception
  - b. culture
  - c. experience
  - d. viewpoint
3. When children recognize how they are perceived by others, they tend to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. generate schemas
  - b. avoid social situations
  - c. form prejudices
  - d. overcompensate for failures
4. It takes about \_\_\_\_\_ minute(s) for the average person to form a first impression of another.
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
5. Using the appropriate slang when making a first impression on a group can \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. alienate you
  - b. attach you to them
  - c. neither *a* nor *b*
  - d. both *a* and *b*
6. People tend to act \_\_\_\_\_ toward a smiling person, and \_\_\_\_\_ toward a cold person.
  - a. guardedly, agreeably
  - b. friendly, negatively
  - c. angrily, openly
  - d. defensively, invitingly
7. A factor of attribution is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. consensus
  - b. self-serving bias
  - c. gender bias
  - d. all of the above
8. Stereotypes tend to \_\_\_\_\_ when an individual is presented with contrary data.
  - a. disappear
  - b. remain
  - c. multiply
  - d. none of the above
9. A strong factor in forming a friendship is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. similarity
  - b. reciprocity
  - c. proximity
  - d. all of the above
10. \_\_\_\_\_ are the three main characteristics of the triangle of love.
  - a. Passion, intimacy, and commitment
  - b. Passion, love, and goals
  - c. Respect, money, and tolerance
  - d. Intimacy, sex, and honesty

### Essay Question

Discuss your view on the effects of discrimination both on society and the victim. In what ways do both society and the victim lose when discrimination is practiced?