

## Social Psychology: Behavior

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- how being part of a group influences the way individuals behave
- why people cooperate with and help others
- what factors contribute to aggressive behavior and violence

On April 20, 1999, two high school students walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where they had already rigged a number of bombs. Once inside, they opened fire on teachers and students, killing 13 and wounding more than 20 others before taking their own lives. In the wake of this tragedy, psychologists and the rest of the American public asked, “What caused these boys to want to harm so many people?”

Humans are social beings. Much of our behavior involves interactions with other people. When and why do we help others? When and why do we try to harm others? How does being part of a group cause us to behave differently from the way we do when we’re alone? Social psychologists study how we interact with other people, how other people influence our behavior, and how we act in response to others.

## Society and Group Influences

In the course of a day, you probably find yourself in a number of different types of social situations. Whether you realize it or not, the society in which you live as well as the different groups to which you belong have a big impact on how you behave. In Chapter 18, you discovered how other people influence the way we think. In this chapter, we'll discuss how other people influence the way we behave.

### What Is a Group?

Have you ever said or done something because of the people you were with? If you have, you know that your behavior can be influenced by a group. In social psychology, a group is more than just a collection of individuals who happen to be in the same place at the same time. To be a **group** in this sense, two or more individuals must:

- \* Interact with each other.
- \* Share a common goal.
- \* Have a relationship that is fairly stable over time.
- \* Be interdependent.
- \* Recognize a relationship between themselves.

You may belong to a number of groups—your family, a sports team, your school chorus, a church group, or an after-school club. Each group has certain standards of behavior called *norms*.

### Norms

**Norms** are spoken or unspoken rules that tell us how we should behave—that is, how others expect us to behave. We rely on social norms to help us act appropriately in social situations. For example, while waiting in line to see a movie, we know that others expect us to wait our turn rather than to push to the front of the line.

Norms affect how we dress, talk, and act. Work norms might require us to dress conservatively, talk politely, and be punctual, while the norms of a social group might include dressing in a current style, using slang, and arriving “fashionably late.” Following norms helps keep social interactions running smoothly.

You probably follow some norms without realizing it. For instance, when you're talking to a friend, you both have a similar idea about how close together you should stand. If you step closer, you are likely to find that your friend steps backward to maintain the “proper” amount of space.



◀ The “Dance of the Eye Contact” happens as the characters try to obey social norms regarding eye contact.

## Norms in Different Cultures

Social behavior varies among cultures because different cultures have different social norms. For example, American culture places a high value on being on time. Many other cultures have no such value. In Russia, people value a sense of seriousness—even tragedy. People who smile too much appear “out of it.” In many cultures, individuals are expected

to demonstrate their emotions, while in others, emotional displays may be seen as a sign of weakness. Norms include everything from dating habits to ideas about modesty to child-rearing practices.

When people from different cultures come together, they may experience a “culture clash” because they have different expectations about how people should behave.



### Would You Conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch did a series of experiments to explore what happens when the pressure to conform to social norms conflicts with a person’s perception of reality.

In his experiments, Asch staged a fake experiment regarding visual judgment. Seven college students were shown a line drawn on a card and three lines drawn on another card. They were asked to identify which of the three lines was the same length as the single line.

Six of the students were actually Asch’s accomplices. The true objective of the experiment was to see whether the seventh student would believe his or her own eyes—and publicly admit it—even when the rest of the group gave a different, incorrect answer.

Asch found that 75 percent of the students he tested went along with the incorrect majority opinion at least some of the time. However, when students wrote their answers in private instead of saying them aloud, they were much less likely to conform. They were also less likely to conform if even one other participant supported their opinion.

Asch’s experiment has important implications for social living because it shows how powerful the desire to conform is. Indeed, this desire to conform is so strong that we may find ourselves publicly supporting attitudes or behaviors that we don’t really agree with—perhaps even when we believe them to be morally wrong.

## Conformity

**Conformity** refers to adopting attitudes or behaviors that reflect the social norms of a group. Groups can exert an enormous pressure to conform. Although social norms might seem to limit our choices and our self-expression, most people conform to most social norms. Why do we feel a need to “go along with the crowd”? Psychologists cite **two** reasons we conform:

1. We want to be liked.
2. We want to be right.

### Why Do We Conform?

If you think that conformity by definition is a bad thing, consider what life would be like without it. Team or club members who do not conform to some norms would have a difficult time working together. Here are some powerful reasons to conform:

- \* We conform when we acknowledge rules of fair play or discussion, keeping our interactions from chaos.
- \* By behaving toward others as we are expected to, we promote group harmony.
- \* Dressing as others do, laughing at the same jokes, or even supporting the same political views often helps us feel that we “belong.”
- \* Agreeing with others, even if they are wrong, prevents us from being wrong by ourselves.

### Sidebar



### Handling Peer Pressure

The pressure to conform to others like yourself is called **peer pressure**, and it can be positive or negative. It can help you do things like maintain good study habits, or it can cause you to do harmful or illegal things that you later regret. The following tips can help you to resist negative peer pressure.

1. Consider what the consequences of your actions will be.
2. Ask yourself what decision you would make if you had a choice. Then remember that you *do* have a choice.
3. Don't believe that “everyone is doing it.” Like you, many other people are able to think for themselves.
4. When you are asked to do something that makes you uncomfortable, don't be afraid to say no and to repeat yourself as needed to make your point.
5. Avoid situations in which you'll be asked to do something that makes you uncomfortable.
6. Look for friends who share your values and who will exert *positive* peer pressure—the kind that helps you make good choices.
7. Don't pressure others to do things that make them uncomfortable.

## Why Do We Choose Not to Conform?

In spite of the pressure to conform, most of us sometimes refuse to do as others do. Although we crave a sense of belonging and a desire to be like others, we also want to feel we are individual and unique. The act of emphasizing our individuality is called **individuation**. When we recognize that we're pressured to adopt attitudes or behaviors in which we do not believe or that we feel may be harmful, we may choose to change groups rather than conform.

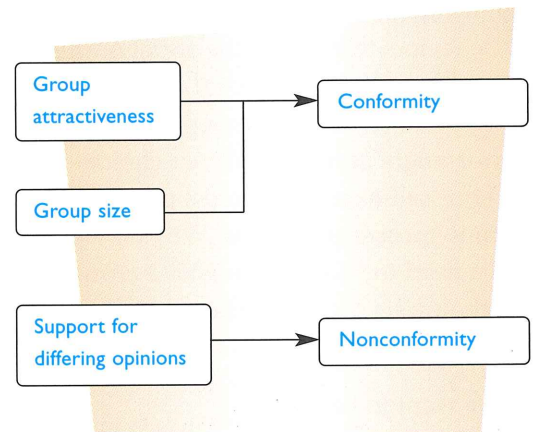
Conforming can certainly be harmful. In 1988, C. S. Crandall studied the eating habits of women in two college sororities. In his study, he found a link between social pressure and binge eating.

## When Are You Most Likely to Conform?

Solomon Asch's research and that of other psychologists has identified some factors that affect the decision to conform:

- \* We are more likely to conform if we like the people exerting the influence and want to be liked by the group.
- \* The larger the group, the more likely we are to conform to it.
- \* We are less likely to conform if the group is not strongly unanimous, so that we may find support for a differing view.

## Conformity Factors



## Cooperation and Competition

Cooperation and competition are important dimensions of human interaction. Consider your classroom. You, your classmates, and your teacher cooperate with each other so that you and your fellow students can learn. You cooperate when you allow your teacher and classmates to speak without interruption, when you participate in class discussions, and so on. However, students also compete with each other. Students who outperform their classmates can reap a variety of benefits, from increased social status to acceptance at top universities.

## What Incentives Do We Have to Cooperate?

Humans are social beings. We live together in cooperative societies or work cooperatively in groups because such arrangements offer many benefits:

- \* **Performance of Tasks.** Cooperation allows us to perform tasks that we couldn't perform by ourselves—such as hunting large game, building a skyscraper, or putting on a play.
- \* **Access to Information or Resources.** Cooperation can give us access to information or resources we would not have access to otherwise. For example, two students could benefit from cooperating on a school project for which one has a collection of research materials and the other has a sophisticated computer graphics program.
- \* **Safety in Numbers.** This incentive is important not just for physical security but in battling any "enemy." For example, two political parties may cooperate with each other to defeat a third party.
- \* **Division of Labor.** Instead of everyone doing each part of a task, each person can focus on what he or she does well and then share the results.

## What Incentives Do We Have to Be Competitive?

Despite these strong incentives to cooperate, in many situations we have more to gain by competing with and succeeding over others:

- \* **More or Better Resources.** Through successful competition, we may be able to win more or better resources, such as money or choice of mates.
- \* **Status.** Successful competition, either by itself or because of its rewards, can earn us a higher status in our group. For example, a class valedictorian and a high school football star both earn their positions by out-competing others.
- \* **Power or Authority.** By competing with others, an individual may achieve power or authority and the ability to assume a leadership position.
- \* **Individual Achievement.** We may compete to satisfy our need for individual achievement.

## Social Dilemmas

If you look over the list of incentives for cooperation, you might notice that each is also a reason why cooperation is in an individual's best interest. But what if someone has more to gain by being selfish when everyone else cooperates? For example, if everyone used public transportation, air pollution would decrease. But if most people agree to use public transportation and you continue to drive, you reap the advantages of both decreased air pollution and the convenience of your own transportation. Do you act with **social responsibility**, for the good of the group, or do you act selfishly? The conflict between wanting to do what is best for the group and what is best for oneself is called a **social dilemma**.



### The Prisoner's Dilemma

A classic social dilemma is the Prisoner's Dilemma. You and a partner are arrested for committing a crime. Being certain of your guilt but having no proof, authorities separate you for questioning and offer each a deal. The deal can have **four** possible outcomes:

1. If you admit some guilt but accuse *your partner* of the worst part of the crime and your partner remains silent, you will get a reduced sentence and your partner will serve the full sentence.
2. If your partner accuses *you* and *you* remain silent, he or she will get the reduced sentence and you will serve the full time.
3. If both of you remain silent, the authorities have no proof and both of you will go free.
4. If both of you accuse the other, you'll both serve the full sentence.

What do you do? The best outcome would occur if both of you remain silent, but can you take the chance that your partner will not tell on you if you remain silent? Unfortunately, your friend follows the same philosophy—you both tell on each other, and you both receive the full sentence.

Indeed, in most computer simulations of this type of dilemma, participants more often take the selfish approach. The issue of environmental pollution discussed in the text demonstrates the Prisoner's Dilemma at work in a broad social context.

### Movements Toward Social Responsibility

Clearly, some problems, such as environmental pollution, can be solved only when individuals work together for the good of the larger group. Think of a three-legged race. Unless both participants win, neither wins.

People may be encouraged to work together for the common good if they:

- \* Realize an individual benefit.
- \* Acknowledge that when many small individual contributions come together, they result in a significant outcome.

For example, we may collectively solve the pollution problem when we realize that pollution affects each of us, take advantage of individual benefits such as speedier car-pool lanes, and recognize the importance of our individual efforts.

## Group Dynamics

Group members interact in ways that influence each other and the group itself. *Group dynamics* describes how groups behave—the factors that affect group decision making, how group roles function, and how different leadership styles affect the group.

### Making Decisions

Whether we are members of a social club or a cabinet of presidential advisors, we often must make decisions as a group. To arrive at a group decision, members start out with individual decisions from which they must eventually reach a consensus.

Groups may find they arrive at a decision based on one of the principles shown below.

Several other factors can also influence the decision-making process.

Group Decisions
<b>Majority Wins</b>
The view with the most initial support is used as the group's decision.
<b>Truth Wins</b>
The final decision results from discussion or argument, based on the idea that the best decision will ultimately be chosen as more group members are convinced of its merit.
<b>First-Shift Position Wins</b>
The final decision goes in the direction of the first member to shift positions.

### Group Polarization

Important decisions are often made by committee because common wisdom holds that group decisions should be less extreme than individual decisions. We assume that individuals start out with opposing views and eventually compromise on a “middle-of-the-road” solution.

According to extensive research by Eugene Burnstein, what happens in reality is often exactly the opposite. Researchers initially called this phenomenon the “risky shift,” because it appeared that groups tended to move toward riskier decisions. However, further research indicated that groups tend to make the more *extreme* decision, whether riskier or more conservative, than any of the individuals would have made alone. This phenomenon is called **group polarization**. Although researchers cannot say why this happens, it has frightening implications for group decisions regarding issues such as declarations of war or jury verdicts.

### Groupthink

**Groupthink** occurs when tightly knit groups place a higher valuation on consensus than on arriving at a good decision. Members may squelch dissenting opinions or ignore or suppress contradictory evidence and come to feel that there is only one course of action to consider.

In 1961 a troop of Cuban exiles, directed by the United States, attempted to invade Cuba and start an uprising. This military operation, called the Bay of Pigs invasion, failed disastrously, embarrassing the United States and intensifying U.S./Cuban



hostilities. The decision to invade, made by President Kennedy and his military advisors, is considered to be a classic example of groupthink. Rather than considering all possible outcomes, the group convinced itself that the invasion could not fail.

### Minority Influence

You might think that the majority viewpoint always wins out in group decision making. However, minority viewpoints can sometimes win approval, particularly if the minority member:

- \* Presents rational rather than emotional arguments.
- \* Maintains a consistent position.
- \* Shows confidence in the position.
- \* Has patience.
- \* Can win over at least one other member.

This is good news for the single voice in a group with opposing views. By following the guidelines above, the minority may turn the group around. Over time, minority influences can lead to major social changes, such as desegregation or voting rights for women.



### Groups and Individual Performance

We've discussed how working cooperatively with others can allow a group of people to achieve results its members couldn't achieve alone. But do *individuals* work more effectively when they are in groups? Researchers have conducted a number of studies to find out.

**Social Loafing.** In one such study, subjects were asked to make noise by cheering and clapping, both alone and in small groups. Researchers found that as the group size grew, the effort expended and noise produced by each person decreased. When participation in a group makes us feel anonymous and we are not being evaluated individually, we may exert *less* effort. This phenomenon is called social loafing. We

seem to reason that if we don't work very hard, somebody else will pick up the slack.

**Social Facilitation.** However, when we feel others may be evaluating our performance, we often exert *more* effort than we would if we were alone. In one experiment, observers watched joggers as they ran alone, then watched their performance as an attractive stranger walked toward them. The runners tended to speed up when they believed someone was observing them. Social facilitation refers to the effect—positive or negative—that the presence of others has on an individual's performance. Current research suggests that in the presence of others we often perform better than usual at tasks we have fully mastered but perform worse than usual at tasks we haven't yet mastered.

## Group Roles

One way to help groups run smoothly is to assign different roles to different group members. Think about a professional sports team. One team member may guard part of the playing area, another may protect the goal, and still another may attack the opposing team's goal. In some groups, roles may be formally assigned; in others, members may simply acquire them over time.

Consider these benefits of group roles:

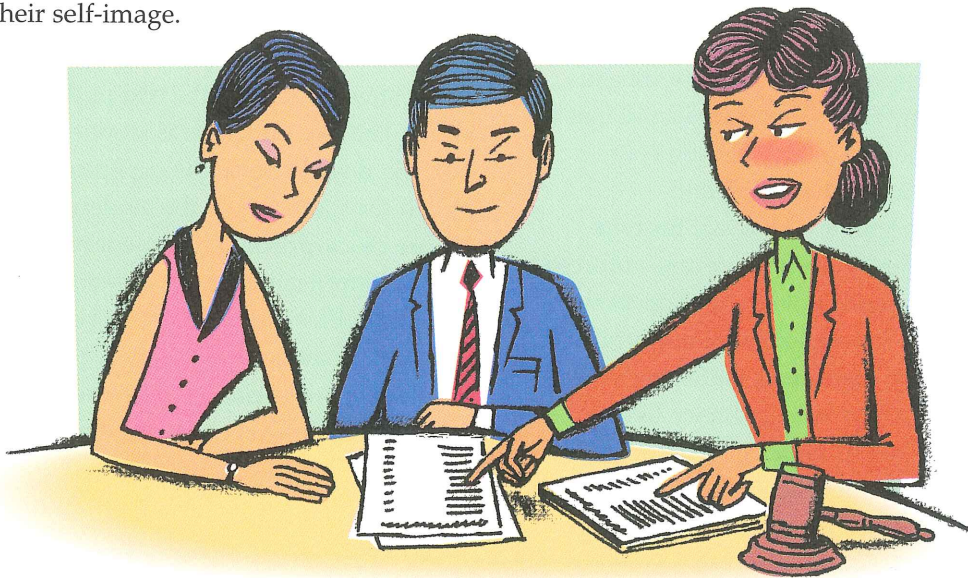
- \* Having distinct roles, including a group leader, establishes a structure or hierarchy for the group.
- \* Roles allow for a division of labor and help clarify each person's responsibilities and obligations.
- \* Assigning clear roles can cut down on social loafing, because each person has a specific task for which he or she is accountable.
- \* Group members may internalize their roles, thereby making them a part of their self-image.

## Group Leadership

The success or failure of a group in attaining its goals may depend largely on the group's leader, who defines goals, plans activities, and directs group efforts.

Psychologists, historians, and other researchers have long tried to identify traits common to strong leaders. In 1991 S. A. Kirkpatrick and Edwin Locke identified some of the traits shared by successful business leaders:

- \* Drive.
- \* Honesty and integrity.
- \* Leadership motivation.
- \* Self-confidence.
- \* Cognitive ability.
- \* Expertise.
- \* Creativity.
- \* Flexibility.



## Leadership Styles

Along with the leader's personal traits, his or her leadership style—how the leader works with the group—also affects the group's success in attaining its goals.

Task-oriented leaders tend to focus on the work of the group members, supervising them as they go. The task-oriented leadership style may be more effective in leading a group that is carrying out a specific job, such as building a clubhouse.

Person-oriented leaders tend to focus on giving group members emotional support and maintaining good interpersonal relationships within the group. The person-oriented leadership style may be appropriate to help a group reach a consensus decision, such as what style of band uniform to choose.

Current theories suggest that the best style of leadership varies according to the situation and that truly great leaders are flexible enough to switch leadership styles as circumstances demand.



### Prisoners and Guards

Psychologists Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo set out to explore the social processes at work in the prison system. They recruited a number of male college students with no history of emotional instability or antisocial tendencies. They randomly assigned half of the students to play the role of guards and half to play prisoners in a mock prison constructed in a campus basement.

The experiment was to last for two weeks. "Guards" wore uniforms, enforced prison rules, and provided prisoners with meals and a few recreational opportunities. They worked eight-hour shifts, between which they lived their ordinary lives. "Prisoners" wore smocks, were identified by numbers rather than names, and stayed in prison around the clock.

By just the second day, the roles began to control the people assigned them. Before the week was out, half of the "prisoners" had to be released early because they demonstrated extreme anxiety and depression. The "guards" had eliminated privileges and taken every opportunity to harass, humiliate, or punish the prisoners, freely staying beyond the end of their shifts. The experiment was stopped after only six days because the experimenters feared for the safety of the students.

The mock-prison experiment has much broader implications than showing why certain problems develop in a prison environment. It shows how easily we can internalize our social roles and how social roles can shape or even dictate our behavior.

## Authority and Obedience

**Obedience** is the act of following orders given by someone in a position of authority. From early childhood, we are taught to respect and obey authority figures, such as parents, teachers, police officers, employers, coaches, church leaders, and others. Obedience to authority helps a society maintain order.

However, the Holocaust during World War II, the My Lai Massacre in the Vietnam War, and the mass suicide-murders at Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978, show the dark side of obedience. Each clearly demonstrates how blind obedience to authority can cause people to commit horrific acts of inhumanity.

### Why Do We Obey Authority?

Studies suggest that most people have the capacity for blind obedience. (See Stanley Milgram's research described on the next page.) Here are some possible reasons:

- \* Most societies rely on hierarchies to provide social structure, organizational benefits, stability, peaceful relations, and group protection. Some researchers suggest we have an evolutionary tendency to accept such hierarchies.
- \* We are trained from birth to function within hierarchies, such as that of the family.

- \* Authority figures have the ability to punish or reward us.
- \* We have a desire to please authority figures.
- \* When we obey authority figures, we consider them—not ourselves—responsible for any consequences. We may say, "I was just following orders."
- \* The scope of the orders may start in a small way and escalate only gradually.

### Personality Characteristics

It is easy to blame acts of brutality on a single "sick" individual who is not at all like us. However, the Holocaust could not have happened without the help of multitudes of ordinary people—law-abiding citizens and good neighbors.

The chilling results of Milgram's study suggest that most ordinary people will obey blindly—even if they are forced to act against their conscience, and even if they think they are harming someone. The traits most likely to lead to such obedience are not sadism or hatred but a tendency to behave submissively and uncritically to authority figures and a belief that one's life is controlled more by outside forces than by oneself.

# CRITICAL THINKING



## Was Milgram's Research Ethical?

Researchers often make the case that the benefit that comes from their discoveries about human behavior outweighs their questionable methods. Was Milgram's research ethical?

### THE EXPERIMENT

In his classic study on obedience, Stanley Milgram recruited volunteers and told them he was looking at the effects of punishment on learning. Volunteers were instructed to deliver electric shocks to a learner strapped into a chair in another room. Each time the learner made a mistake, the volunteer was to increase the shock by 15 volts. The machine was marked to show that the shocks progressed from "slight shock," "medium shock," "very strong shock," "danger—severe shock," to "XXX."

The volunteers could hear the learners moan and cry out. When the volunteers complained about the cries, the experimenter said, "The experiment requires that you go on." The great majority of volunteers delivered "very strong" shocks, and more than half went up to the maximum—in spite of the cries and even after the learner stopped responding altogether.

The learners were not in fact receiving shocks, and after each experiment was over, the researcher explained the study to the volunteer. Critics object that the study was cruel, making subjects think they were harming—and perhaps killing—someone. Although they learned they had not hurt anyone, the volunteers were left with the realization that they were capable of doing harm.

Milgram insisted to his critics that his findings about human nature and obedience to authority were more important than the discomfort of the subjects. His supporters argue that his findings help explain such things as how the Nazis were able to get ordinary citizens to commit atrocities. What do you think?

### THE PROCESS

- 1 Describe the experiment.** In your own words, summarize the experiment.
- 2 Provide evidence.** List the evidence from the case study that backs up the argument *in support* of Milgram's research.
- 3 Give opposing arguments.** From the case study and from your own experience, list the evidence that backs up the argument *against* Milgram's experiment.
- 4 Look for more information.** What else would you want to know before you decide? Make a list of your questions. Then research *Milgram* and *obedience* in an encyclopedia, on

the Internet, or in the psychology section of the library.

- 5 Evaluate the information.** Make a chart with two columns:

Milgram's Obedience Studies	
<u>Ethical</u>	<u>Not Ethical</u>

Record the evidence and give each item a number from 1 to 5 to show its importance. Number 1 is most important.

- 6 Draw conclusions.** Write one paragraph explaining your view of the ethics of the experiment.

## Helping Behavior

Helping others without expecting something in return is called **altruism**. Are people generally altruistic? Consider the following incidents that made the news:

- \* In 1982 an airplane crashed in Washington, D.C., plunging into the icy waters of the Potomac. As rescue crews threw lifelines to passengers in the water, one passenger repeatedly gave his lifeline to other passengers. They were pulled to safety, but the heroic passenger himself died.
- \* In 1964 a woman named Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death in New York City while 38 neighbors watched from their windows. Although the attack took almost half an hour, no one came out to help or even called the police.

### Why Do We Help?

The Kitty Genovese case shocked the nation and triggered a number of studies about why people help or do not help others. Some of these studies suggest we are most likely to come to someone else's assistance when:

- \* The situation is clearly an emergency.
- \* The victim is similar to ourselves.
- \* We perceive that the victim did not bring the emergency on him- or herself.
- \* We know what to do or have some relevant expertise, such as knowledge of first aid.

But what causes us to help at all? Some studies suggest that our desire to help others may have selfish motivations and that we *do* receive something in return.

### Emotions

According to some researchers, helping others helps us feel good about ourselves or prevents us from feeling guilty that we *didn't* help someone in need. A 1987 experiment supports this idea. In it, Robert Cialdini found that his subjects were less likely to help others if they were told they had been given a pill that would prevent their moods from changing.

### Genetics

Some social psychologists believe that humans may be "programmed" to help others because we are social beings. Over time, this helpfulness can help us to survive by strengthening social bonds. Other researchers believe that we may be genetically programmed to help others *like ourselves* because in doing so, we may be helping more of our own genes pass to the next generation.

### Why Don't We Help?

Media accounts of the day suggested that Kitty Genovese died because of the overall apathy and selfishness of American society. To explore this issue, researchers Bibb Latane and John Darley brought subjects into the laboratory supposedly for purposes of market research. Then, either alone or with others, the subjects witnessed a staged emergency—screams from another room, the sounds of medical emergencies, or the sudden appearance of smoke.

The researchers were surprised to find that most of the subjects, when they were alone, responded to the emergency. If they were among others, or thought that others were aware of the situation, they were much less likely to help. In fact, as the number of participants increased, fewer and fewer of them responded.

Psychologists suggest the following explanations for this phenomenon:

- \* Because many situations are ambiguous, we take our cues from others. For example, a fight between a man and a woman may be a mugging or a lovers' quarrel. If other witnesses don't respond, we don't view it as an emergency.
- \* When others are present, we worry about how they will judge our actions—or overreactions. We are inhibited because we don't want to look foolish.
- \* When alone, we feel a responsibility to act. When part of a group, we experience **diffusion of responsibility**. That is,

the same responsibility exists, but it is spread over a number of people, so each one feels less responsibility. The more people involved, the less responsibility each feels.

- \* We may assume that others are more knowledgeable or more capable of dealing with the situation than we are.

Sometimes people are afraid to ask for help for fear of appearing incompetent or weak. This is especially true in societies such as ours that value individual achievement. However, there are important reasons why you should ask for help if you need it, since people are often reluctant to offer help if a situation is ambiguous and they are not certain that someone is in distress. Others may not offer help because they fear their assistance will be seen as threatening or intimidating.



## Aggression and Violence

In the wake of incidents such as the Columbine High School massacre, psychologists continue to debate the causes of **aggression**—behavior that is meant to harm someone. Why are people aggressive?

### Frustration and Aggression

In the 1930s, a group of behaviorists developed the frustration-aggression hypothesis, identifying frustration as the cause of all aggression. Indeed, many aggressive incidents are directly triggered by frustration. Road rage is an example of aggression resulting from frustration—a fist fight erupts when one person steals another's parking space, cuts someone off, or otherwise interferes with another driver's progress. However, while psychologists agree that frustration often contributes to aggression, most no longer believe that frustration is the primary cause.

### Generalized Arousal

Imagine that as you are on your way to school, a car careens around the corner and you have to run for safety. Then, just as you get to the library, another student takes the last computer terminal. Ordinarily you would shrug it off, but today you find yourself tensing.

You may not consciously connect the two incidents, but they may be connected just the same. Recent research suggests that strong physiological or emotional arousal

may carry over from one situation to another. Even though the final incident is not intense, your strong pre-existing arousal could be the factor that tips the scales toward aggressive behavior.

### Group Violence

What began as a peaceful political rally turns into a riot. The home team wins a championship, and fans respond by overturning cars and clashing with police. Why does a group setting sometimes cause people to behave more aggressively than they would otherwise?

- \* As we've previously discussed, groups often adopt a more extreme course of action than individuals.
- \* In a process called **deindividuation**, people in groups become less aware of themselves as individuals and less aware of their own values and the social norms they usually follow.
- \* Being in a group may impart a sense of anonymity. Without the threat of being judged individually, group members may lose their usual inhibitions.

Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan encourage deindividuation by wearing hoods—increasing the sense that members are part of a group, rather than a collection of individuals. Furthermore, wearing hoods assures anonymity. These factors may contribute to a loss of inhibition against aggressive behavior.



## Environmental Influences

Today, debate rages over whether the constant bombardment of violent images on television and in movies contributes to aggression in our society. While long-term effects have yet to be proven or disproven, exposure to violent shows or movies does seem to raise levels of aggression in the short term.

In one study, moviegoers emerging from violent movies filled out questionnaires designed to measure aggressive tendencies. They scored higher on these tests than those waiting in line for the same movie. In another study, young children were shown films of adults playing with an inflated doll. The children who saw the adults attack the doll were much more likely to do the same when given the inflated doll to play with.

Some long-term studies suggest that people who watched a lot of television violence as children tend to show higher levels of aggression as adults. In addition, people with aggressive tendencies seem to prefer violent programming. This can lead to an endless cycle—people with aggressive tendencies watch more violent programming, which increases their aggressive tendencies, which leads to increased preference toward violent programming.

Researchers hypothesize that media violence contributes to aggressive tendencies because:

- \* Viewing such materials raises an individual's level of general arousal.
- \* People, especially children, tend to imitate what they see.

- \* Frequent exposure to media violence eventually desensitizes viewers.
- \* Aggressive people tend to seek out aggressive material, which causes them to become even more aggressive.
- \* Viewing aggressive material seems to weaken the viewer's inhibitions against violence.

These findings do not apply only to "shoot-'em-up" types of programs. Some studies indicate that watching aggressive sports events also increases aggressive tendencies.

## The Freudian View of Aggression

Freud called aggression an inborn human trait. He believed that people are ruled by two instincts: *eros*, an instinct for pleasure and love, and *thanatos*, an instinct for self-destruction, sometimes called a *death wish*. He thought aggressive behavior was caused by the self-destructive instinct turning outward, toward others.

Freud also believed that aggressive energy builds up in people over time. This energy had to be released through **catharsis**, or individuals would erupt in a violent outburst. Catharsis could be achieved through playing or watching sports or through other intense experiences. However, current research suggests that these activities actually increase a person's aggressiveness.

## The Evolutionary View of Aggression

Other scientists, such as Konrad Lorenz, also proposed that aggression is inborn. Unlike Freud, Lorenz looked for evolutionary connections, comparing human behavior with that of other animals. He suggested that aggressive tendencies helped humans survive and were therefore passed down to succeeding generations. For example, aggressive tendencies might prove helpful in hunting, in acquiring a mate, or in defending territory and resources.

However, opponents point out that if aggression were strictly an inborn human trait, all human societies should show it in about equal measure. Murder rates of different societies suggest that this is not the case. The murder rate in the United States is about eight times that of Norway, and some areas of New Guinea have a murder rate about 800 times higher than that of Norway.

## Biological Explanations of Aggression

A number of biological factors, including the following, can also affect one's tendency to behave in an aggressive manner:

- \* Higher levels of testosterone, the male sex hormone, seem to be related to higher levels of aggression in men.
- \* Consuming alcohol seems to weaken inhibitions against aggressive impulses.
- \* Drugs such as amphetamines can cause individuals to misinterpret external cues and attack others they perceive as a threat.

- \* The hypothalamus controls rage and other emotions. Injuries or even allergies can affect its functioning.
- \* Chemical imbalances in the brain can keep a person from feeling empathy and other emotions that can inhibit aggression against others.

## Learning and Cultural Explanations of Aggression

Most social psychologists today recognize learning and cultural training as important factors in aggression. For example, children may be rewarded for aggression when they acquire a toy they want by bullying another child. They may learn restraint when they are punished for aggressive behavior. Furthermore, children who grow up in abusive households are more likely themselves to adopt aggressive behaviors.

A culture's norms also play a role. For example, little boys may be told that they should "be tough" or "act like a man." Over time, we learn norms regarding:

- \* What people or groups of people we can act aggressively toward.
- \* What kinds of behavior by others deserve an aggressive response.
- \* When or under what circumstances aggression is appropriate.

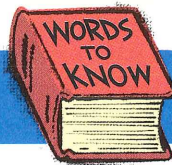
## Chapter 19 Wrap-up

### SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: BEHAVIOR

Much of human behavior involves interactions with others, often in groups. Groups have spoken or unspoken rules, called norms, that tell group members how they should behave. Cooperation, competition, conformity, and obedience are aspects of group behavior.

Psychologists explore why people help or harm others. Current research suggests that such factors as biology, learning, cultural factors, genetics, and physiological state, as well as influences such as media violence, contribute to an individual's tendencies toward harming others.

### Psychology



**aggression**—behavior that is meant to harm another person or group of people. *p.* 327

**altruism**—helping others without expecting something in return. *p.* 325

**catharsis**—release of tension and anxiety associated with pent-up emotions. *p.* 328

**conformity**—act of adopting attitudes or behaviors that reflect the social norms of a group. *p.* 315

**deindividuation**—process through which people in groups become less aware of themselves as individuals. *p.* 327

**diffusion of responsibility**—responsibility that is spread over a number of people, such that each one feels less responsibility. *p.* 326

**group**—two or more individuals who interact with each other, share a common goal, have a relationship that is fairly stable over time, are interdependent, and recognize a relationship between themselves. *p.* 313

**group polarization**—tendency for a group's decision to become more extreme than those of the individuals in the group. *p.* 319

**groupthink**—tendency for tightly knit groups to adopt a unified opinion, ignoring dissent or contrary evidence. *p.* 319

**individuation**—act of emphasizing individuality. *p.* 316

**norms**—spoken or unspoken rules that tell us how others expect us to behave. *p.* 313

**obedience**—act of following orders given by someone in a position of authority. *p.* 323

**peer pressure**—pressure to conform to others like yourself. *p.* 315

**social dilemma**—conflict between wanting to do what is best for the group and what is best for oneself. *p.* 317

**social responsibility**—acting for the good of the group. *p.* 317