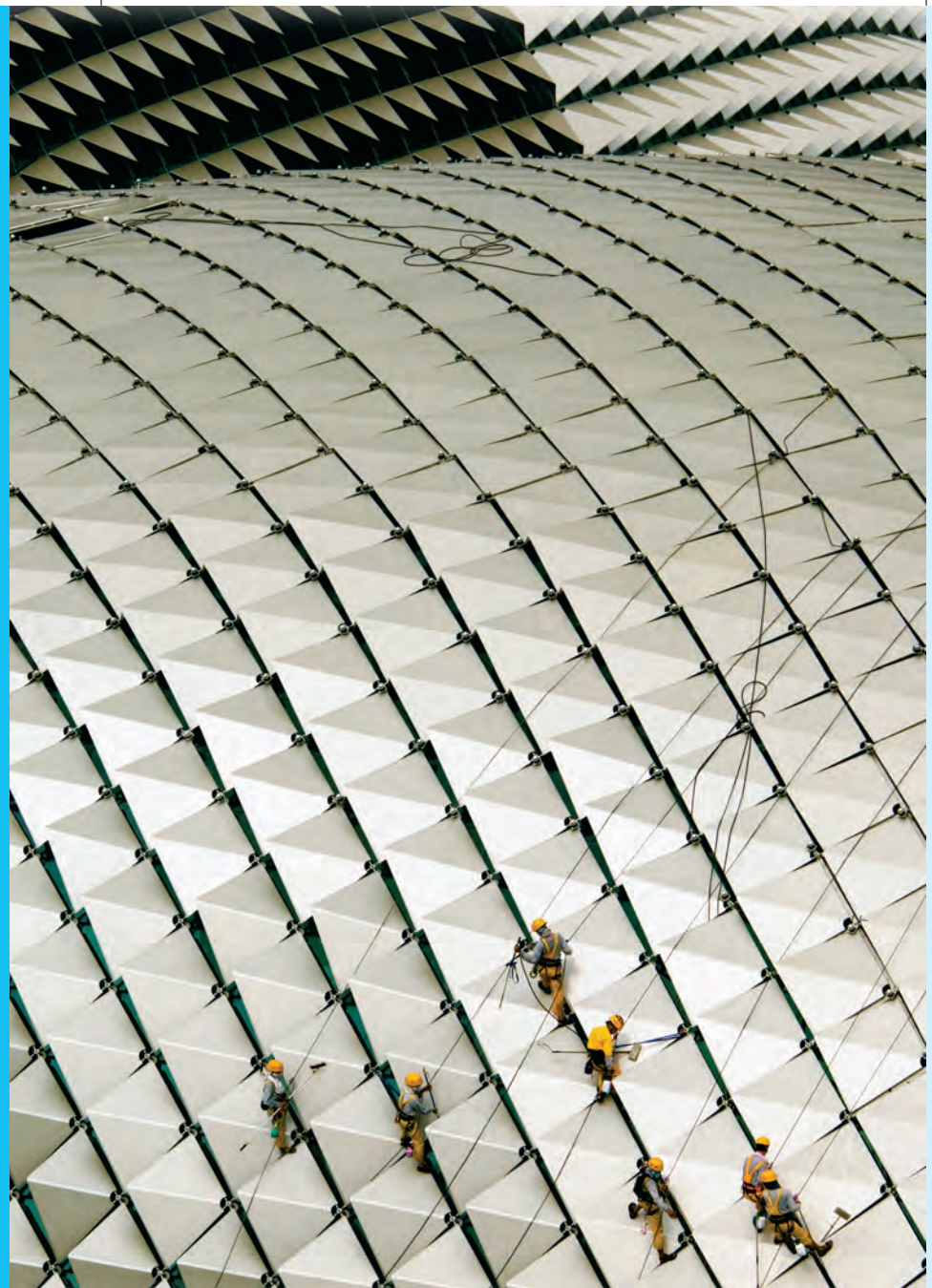


8

Behaviour in Social and Cultural Context



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Even the most sadistic and destructive man is human,
as human as the saint.

ERICH FROMM

In Rwanda in 1994, members of the Hutu tribe shot or hacked to death hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, a rival tribe. At one point, thousands of Tutsi took refuge in a Benedictine convent, believing the nuns there would shelter them. Instead, the mother superior, Sister Gertrude, and another nun, Sister Maria Kisito—both of them Hutu—reported the Tutsi refugees to the Hutu militia. More than 7000 Tutsi were killed in the ensuing massacre. When the two nuns were brought to trial in Belgium, where they had fled after the war, Sister Gertrude told the court she did it because “we were all going to perish.” But observers testified that when 500 Tutsi fled to the convent’s garage, the two nuns brought the militiamen gasoline. The garage was set afire, and anyone trying to escape the flames was hacked to death. The two women were sentenced to 15- and 12-year terms for crimes against humanity.

In 1961, Adolf Eichmann was put on trial for murder, although he personally had never killed anyone. Eichmann, a high-ranking officer of the Nazi SS (an elite military unit of storm troopers), supervised the deportation and death of millions of Jews during the Second World War. He was proud of his efficiency at his work and his



Rwandan Hutu nuns Sister Gertrude and Sister Maria Kisito at their trial in Brussels, and Adolf Eichmann at his trial in Israel. These people committed barbaric crimes against humanity. Were they “monsters”?

norms (social) Rules that regulate human life, including social conventions, explicit laws, and implicit cultural standards.

role A given social position governed by a set of norms for proper behaviour.

ability to resist feeling pity for his victims. But when the Israelis captured him, he insisted that he was not anti-Semitic: He had had a Jewish mistress and he personally arranged for the protection of his Jewish half-cousin—two dangerous crimes for an SS officer. Shortly before his execution by hanging, Eichmann said, “I am not the monster I am made out to be. I am the victim of a fallacy” (R. Brown, 1986).

The fallacy to which Eichmann referred was the widespread belief that a person who does monstrous deeds must be a monster, someone sick and evil. Is that true? Sisters Gertrude and Maria Kisito and Adolf Eichmann all committed monstrous deeds leading to the deaths of thousands of innocent people. Were they crazy? Evil?

So much evil and cruelty in the world—and yet, even more often, so much kindness, sacrifice, and heroism. How can we even begin to explain either side of human nature?

The fields of *social psychology* and *cultural psychology* approach this question by examining the powerful influence of the social and cultural environment on the actions of individuals and groups. In this chapter, we will focus on the foundations of social psychology, basic principles that can help us understand why some people who are not “crazy” or “monstrous” nonetheless do unspeakably evil things—or, for that matter, why some otherwise ordinary people reach heights of heroism when the occasion demands. In particular, we will look at roles, attitudes, and groups, including the conditions under which people conform or dissent. Then we will consider some of the social and cultural reasons for prejudice and conflict between groups.

WHAT'S AHEAD

- How do social rules regulate behaviour—and what is likely to happen when you violate them?
- Do you have to be mean or disturbed to inflict pain on someone just because an authority tells you to?
- How can ordinary university students be transformed into sadistic prison guards?
- How can people be “entrapped” into violating their moral principles?



Many roles in modern life require us to give up our individuality. If one of these members of the British Coldstream Guards suddenly broke into a dance, his career would be brief—and the dazzling effect of the parade would be ruined. But when does adherence to a role go too far?

Roles and Rules

“We are all fragile creatures entwined in a cobweb of social constraints,” social psychologist Stanley Milgram once said. The constraints he referred to are **social norms**, rules about how we are supposed to act. Norms are the conventions of everyday life that make interactions with other people predictable and orderly; like a cobweb, they are often as invisible as they are strong. Every society has norms for just about everything in human experience: for conducting courtships, for raising children, for making decisions, for behaving in public places. Some norms are enshrined in law, such as, “A person may not beat up another person, except in self-defence.” Some are unspoken cultural understandings, such as, “A man may beat up another man who insults his masculinity.” And some are tiny, unspoken regulations that people learn to follow unconsciously, such as, “You may not sing at the top of your lungs on a public bus.”

In every society, people also fill a variety of **social roles**, positions regulated by norms about how people in those positions should behave. Gender roles define the proper behaviour for a man and a woman. Occupational roles determine the correct behaviour for a manager and an employee, a professor and a student. Family roles set tasks for parent and child, husband and wife. Certain aspects of every role must be carried out or there will be penalties—emotional, financial, and professional. As a student, for instance, you know just what you have to do to pass your psychology course (or you should by now!).

The requirements of a social role are in turn shaped by the culture you live in. **Culture** can be defined as a program of shared rules that govern the behaviour of people in a community or society, and a set of values and beliefs shared by most members of that community and passed from one generation to another (Lonner, 1995). You learn most of your culture's rules and values the way you learn your culture's language—without thinking about it.

For example, cultures differ in their rules for *conversational distance*: how close people normally stand to one another when they are speaking (Hall, 1959, 1976). Arabs like to stand close enough to feel your breath, touch your arm, and see your eyes—a distance that makes most Westerners uneasy, unless they are talking intimately with a lover. English and Swedish people stand farthest apart when they converse; southern Europeans stand closer; and Latin Americans and Arabic people stand the closest (Keating, 1994; Sommer, 1969). Knowing another culture's rules, though, does not make it any easier to change your own. Caroline Keating (1994), a cultural psychologist, told about walking on a street with a Pakistani colleague. The closer he moved toward her, seeking the closeness he was comfortable with, the more she moved away, seeking the distance *she* was comfortable with. Eventually she fell off the curb!

Naturally, people bring their own personalities and interests to the roles they play. Just as two actors will play Hamlet differently although they are reading from the same script, you will have your own “reading” of how to play the role of student, friend, parent, or employer. Nonetheless, the requirements of a social role are strong—so strong that they may even cause you to behave in ways that shatter your fundamental sense of the kind of person you are. We turn now to two famous studies that illuminate the power of social roles in our lives.

The Obedience Study

In the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974) designed a study that would become world famous. It was, in effect, a study of Eichmann's claim that he was not a “monster,” just a normal man following orders.

Design and Findings. Milgram wanted to know how many people would obey an authority figure when directly ordered to violate their own ethical standards. Participants in the study, however, thought they were part of an experiment on the effects of punishment on learning. Each was assigned, apparently at random, to the role of “teacher.” Another person, introduced as a fellow volunteer, was the “learner.” Whenever the learner, seated in an adjoining room, made an error in reciting a list of word pairs he was supposed to have memorized, the teacher had to give him an electric shock by depressing a lever on a machine (see Figure 8.1). With each error, the voltage (marked from 0 to 450) was to be increased by another 15 volts. The shock levels on the machine were labelled from SLIGHT SHOCK to DANGER—SEVERE SHOCK and, finally, ominously, to XXX. In reality, the learners were confederates of Milgram and did not receive any shocks, but none of the teachers ever realized this during the study. The actor-victims played their parts for a recording, shouting in pain and pleading to be released, all according to a prearranged script.

Before doing this study, Milgram asked a number of psychiatrists, students, and middle-class adults how many people they thought would “go all the way” to XXX on orders from the researcher. The psychiatrists predicted that most people would refuse to go beyond 150 volts, when the learner first demanded to be freed, and that only 1 person in 1000, someone who was disturbed and sadistic, would administer

culture A program of shared rules that govern the behaviour of members of a community or society, and a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes shared by most members of that community.

> Get Involved

Dare to Be Different

Either alone or with a friend, try a mild form of “norm violation” (nothing alarming, obscene, dangerous, or offensive). For example, stand backward in line at the grocery store or cafeteria; sit right next to a stranger in the library or at a movie, even when other seats are available; sing or hum loudly for a couple of minutes in a public place; stand “too close” to a friend in conversation. Notice the reactions of onlookers as well as your own feelings while you violate this norm. If you do this exercise with someone else, one of you can be the “violatee” and the other can note down the responses of others; then switch places. Was it easy to do this exercise? Why or why not?



Arabic people stand much closer in conversation than most Westerners do, close enough to feel one another's breath and “read” one another's eyes. Most Westerners would feel “crowded” standing so close, even talking to a friend.

Figure 8.1

THE MILGRAM OBEDIENCE EXPERIMENT

On the left is Milgram's original shock machine; in 1963, it looked pretty ominous. On the right, the "learner" is being strapped into his chair by the experimenter and the "teacher."



the highest voltage. The nonprofessionals agreed with this prediction, and all of them said that they personally would disobey early in the procedure.

That is not the way the results turned out. Every single person administered some shock to the learner, and about two-thirds of the participants, of all ages and from all walks of life, obeyed to the fullest extent. Many protested to the experimenter, but they backed down when he calmly asserted, "The experiment requires that you continue."

They obeyed no matter how much the victim shouted for them to stop and no matter how painful the shocks seemed to be. They obeyed even when they themselves were anguished about the pain they believed they were causing. As Milgram (1974) noted, participants would "sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh"—but still they obeyed.

More than 1000 participants eventually went through replications of the Milgram study. Most of them, men and women equally, inflicted what they thought were dangerous amounts of shock to another person. Researchers in other countries have also found high percentages of obedience, ranging to more than 90 percent in Spain and the Netherlands (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995; Smith & Bond, 1994).

Milgram and his team subsequently set up several variations of the study to determine the circumstances under which people might disobey the experimenter. They found that virtually nothing the victim did or said changed the likelihood of compliance—even when the victim said he had a heart condition, screamed in agony, or stopped responding entirely as if he had collapsed. However, people *were* more likely to disobey under the following conditions:

- *When the experimenter left the room*, many people then subverted authority by giving low levels of shock but reporting that they had followed orders.
- *When the victim was right there in the room*, and the teacher had to administer the shock directly to the victim's body.
- *When two experimenters issued conflicting demands* to continue the experiment or to stop at once. In this case, no one continued to inflict shock.
- *When the person ordering them to continue was an ordinary man*, apparently another volunteer, instead of the authoritative experimenter.
- *When the subject worked with peers who refused to go further*. Seeing someone else rebel gave subjects the courage to disobey.

Obedience, Milgram concluded, was more a function of the situation than of the particular personalities of the participants. "The key to [their] behavior," Milgram (1974) summarized, "lies not in pent-up anger or aggression but in the nature of

THINKING CRITICALLY

Ask Questions

Jot down your best guess in answering these three questions: (1) What percentage of people are sadistic? (2) If told by an authority to harm an innocent person, what percentage of people would do it? (3) If you were instructed to harm an innocent person, would you do it or would you refuse?

their relationship to authority. They have given themselves to the authority; they see themselves as instruments for the execution of his wishes; once so defined, they are unable to break free.”

Evaluating the Obedience Study. The Milgram study has had its critics. Some consider it unethical because people were kept in the dark about what was really happening until the session was over (of course, telling them in advance would have invalidated the study) and because many suffered emotional pain (Milgram countered that they would not have felt pain if they had simply disobeyed instructions). Others question the conclusion that personality traits always have less influence on behaviour than the demands of the situation; certain traits, such as hostility and rigidity, do increase obedience to authority in real life (Blass, 1993, 2000).

Some psychologists also object to the parallel Milgram drew between the behaviour of the study’s participants and the brutality of the Nazis and others who commit acts of barbarism in the name of duty (Berkowitz, 1999; Darley, 1995). The people in Milgram’s study obeyed only when the experimenter was hovering right there, and many of them felt enormous discomfort and conflict. In contrast, the Nazis acted without direct supervision by authorities, without external pressure, and presumably without feelings of anguish.

Nevertheless, this famous and compelling study has had a tremendous influence on public awareness of the dangers of uncritical obedience (Blass, 2000). As John Darley (1995) observed, “Milgram shows us the beginning of a path by means of which ordinary people, in the grip of social forces, become the origins of atrocities in the real world.”

The Prison Study

Another famous demonstration of the power of roles is known as the Stanford Prison Study. Philip Zimbardo and colleagues wanted to know what would happen if ordinary university students were randomly assigned to the roles of prisoners and guards (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). To do so, they set up a serious-looking “prison” in the basement of the psychology department, complete with individual cells and different uniforms for prisoners and guards (including nightsticks for the guards).

Design and Findings. The young men who volunteered for this experience were paid a daily fee and agreed to take part in the experiment for two weeks. Although they were randomly assigned to be prisoners or guards, they were given no instructions about how to behave. The results were dramatic. Within a short time, the prisoners became distressed, helpless, and panicky. They developed emotional symptoms and physical ailments. Some became apathetic; others became rebellious. After a few days, half of the prisoners begged to be let out. They were more than willing to forfeit their pay to gain an early release.

Within an equally short time, the guards adjusted to their new power. Some tried to be nice and some were “tough but fair,” holding strictly to “the rules.” However, about a third became tyrannical. Although they were free to use any method to maintain order, they almost always chose to be harsh and abusive, even when the prisoners were not resisting in any way. One guard, unaware that he was being observed by the researchers, paced the corridor while the prisoners were sleeping, pounding his nightstick into his hand. Another put a prisoner in solitary confinement (a small closet) and tried to keep him there all night. He concealed this information from the researchers, who were “too soft” on the prisoners. By the way, not one of the less actively cruel guards ever intervened or complained about the behaviour of their more abusive peers.



In Milgram’s study, when the “teacher” had to administer shock directly to the learner, most subjects refused—but this one continued to obey.

The researchers ended this study after only six days, because they had not expected such a speedy and terrifying transformation of healthy students. The prisoners were relieved by this decision, but most of the guards were disappointed. They had enjoyed their short-lived authority.

Evaluating the Prison Study. Critics maintain that you cannot learn much from such an artificial set-up. They argue that the volunteers already knew, from movies, TV, and games, how they were supposed to behave. The guards acted their parts to the hilt in order to have fun and please the researchers. Their behaviour was no more surprising than if they had been dressed in football gear and had then been found to be willing to tackle each other. The prison study made a great story, said some critics, but it wasn't *research*. That is, the researchers did not carefully investigate relationships between factors; despite being dramatic, it provided no new information (Festinger, 1980).

On the other hand, in real prisons guards do have the kind of power that was given to these students! Craig Haney and Philip Zimbardo responded that this dramatization illustrated the power of roles in a way that no ordinary lab experiment ever could. If the guards were just having fun, why did they lose sight of the “game” and behave as if it were a real job? Twenty-five years after the prison study was done, Haney and Zimbardo (1998) reflected on its contribution to understanding the behaviour of real prisoners and guards in prisons, and also to increasing public awareness of how situations can outweigh personality and private values in influencing behaviour.

Generations of students and the general public have seen compelling clips from videos of the study made at the time. To the researchers, the results demonstrated how roles affect behaviour: The guards' aggression, they said, was entirely a result of wearing a guard's uniform and having the power conferred by a guard's authority (Haney & Zimbardo, 1998). Recently, however, critics have argued that the prison study is really another example of obedience to authority and of how willingly some people obey instructions—in this case, from Zimbardo himself (Haslam & Reicher, 2003). Consider the briefing that Zimbardo provided to the “guards” at the beginning of the study:

You can create in the prisoners feelings of boredom, a sense of fear to some degree, you can create a notion of arbitrariness that their life is totally controlled by us, by the system, you, me, and they'll have no privacy. . . . We're going to take away their individuality in various ways. In general what all this leads to is a sense of powerlessness. That is, in this situation we'll have all the power and they'll have none (The Stanford Prison Study video, quoted in Haslam & Reicher, 2003).

These are pretty powerful suggestions to the guards about how they would be permitted to behave, and they convey Zimbardo's personal encouragement (“we'll have all the power”), so perhaps it is not surprising that some took Zimbardo at his word and behaved quite brutally. The one sadistic guard now says he was just trying to play the role of the “worst S.O.B. guard” he'd seen in the movies. On the other hand, in real prisons guards do have the kind of power that was given to these students, and they too may be given instructions that encourage them to treat prisoners harshly. Thus the prison study remains a powerful demonstration of how the social situation—whether the role itself or obedience to authority—affects behaviour, causing some people to behave in ways that seem “out of character.”

Why People Obey

These two studies vividly demonstrate the power of social roles and obligations to influence the behaviour of individuals. Of course, obedience to authority or to the norms of



Why did the guards at Abu Ghraib abuse and humiliate their prisoners? Were these guards just “bad apples”? Social psychologists think the answer lies in the roles they were assigned; the implicit permission, if not direct orders, given by their leaders; and the group norms of their peers. The fact that the guards willingly posed for pictures—in many, they are smiling proudly—indicates that they were showing off for their friends, and that they believed their behaviour was normal and appropriate.

a situation is not always harmful or bad. A certain amount of routine compliance with rules is necessary in any group, and obedience to authority has many benefits for individuals and society. A nation could not operate if all of its citizens ignored traffic signals, cheated on their taxes, dumped garbage wherever they chose, or assaulted each other. An organization could not function if its members came to work only when they felt like it. But obedience also has a darker aspect. Throughout history, the plea “I was only following orders” has been offered to excuse orders carried out that were foolish, destructive, or illegal. The writer C. P. Snow once observed that “more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than in the name of rebellion.”

Most people follow orders because of the obvious consequences of disobedience: They can be suspended from school, fired from their jobs, or arrested. They may also obey because of what they hope to gain: being liked, getting certain advantages or promotions from the authority, learning from the authority’s greater knowledge or experience. Primarily, though, people obey because they are deeply convinced of the authority’s legitimacy. That is, they obey not in hope of gaining some tangible benefit, but because they like and respect the authority and value the relationship (Tyler, 1997).

But what about all those obedient people in Milgram’s study who felt they were doing wrong and who wished they were free, but who could not disobey or untangle themselves from social constraints? Why do people obey when it is not in their interests, or when obedience requires them to ignore their own values or even commit a crime? How do they become morally disengaged from the consequences of their actions? Researchers looking at the social context of behaviour draw our attention to several factors that cause people to obey when they would rather not (Bandura, 1999; Gourevich, 1998; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Staub, 1999):

1 *Allocating responsibility to the authority.* One common way that people justify their behaviour is to hand over responsibility to the authority, thereby absolving themselves of accountability for their actions. In Milgram’s study, many of those who administered the highest levels of shock adopted the attitude “It’s his problem; I’m just following orders.” In contrast, individuals who refused to give high levels of shock took responsibility for their own actions and refused to grant the authority legitimacy. “One of the things I think is very cowardly,” said a 32-year-old engineer, “is to try to shove the responsibility onto someone else. See, if I now turned around and said, ‘It’s your fault . . . it’s not mine,’ I would call that cowardly” (Milgram, 1974).

2 *Routinizing the task.* When people define their actions in terms of routine duties and roles, their behaviour starts to feel normal—just a job to be done. Becoming absorbed in busy-work distracts them from doubts or ethical questions, and it fosters an uncritical, mindless attention to details that obscures the larger picture. In the Milgram study, some people became so fixated on the “learning task” that they shut out any moral concerns about the learner’s demands to be let out. Routinization is typically the mechanism by which governments enlist citizens to aid and abet programs of genocide. Nazi bureaucrats kept meticulous records of every victim, and in Cambodia the Khmer Rouge recorded the names and histories of the millions of victims they tortured and killed. “I am not a violent man,” said Sous Thy, one of the clerks who recorded these names, to a reporter from the *New York Times*. “I was just making lists.”

3 *Wanting to be polite.* Good manners protect people’s feelings and make relationships and civilization possible. But once people are caught in what they perceive to be legitimate roles and are obeying a legitimate authority, good manners



The routinization of torture allows people to commit or collaborate in atrocities. More than 16 000 political prisoners were tortured and killed at Tuol Sleng prison by Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge, during the genocidal regime of Pol Pot. Prison authorities kept meticulous records and photos of each victim in order to make their barbarous activities seem mundane and normal. This man, Ing Pech, one of only seven survivors, was spared because he had skills useful to his captors. He now runs a museum at the prison.

entrapment A gradual process in which individuals escalate their commitment to a course of action to justify their investment of time, money, or effort.

ensnare them into further obedience. Most people do not want to rock the boat, appear to doubt the experts, or be rude, because they know they will be disliked for doing so (Collins & Brief, 1995).

Most people learn the language of manners (“please,” “thank you,” “I’m sorry”), but they literally lack the words to justify disobedience and rudeness toward others. In the Milgram study, many people could not find the words to justify walking out, so they stayed. One woman kept apologizing to the experimenter, trying not to offend him with her worries for the victim: “Do I go right to the end, sir? I hope there’s nothing wrong with him there.” (She did go right to the end.) A man repeatedly protested and questioned the experimenter, but he too obeyed, even when the victim had apparently collapsed in pain. “He thinks he is killing someone,” Milgram (1974) commented, “yet he uses the language of the tea table.”

4 *Becoming entrapped.* Entrapment is a process in which individuals escalate their commitment to a course of action in order to justify their investment in it (Brockner & Rubin, 1985). The first steps of entrapment pose no difficult choices, but one step leads to another, and before you realize it, you have become committed to a course of action that poses problems. In Milgram’s study, once subjects had given a 15-volt shock, they had committed themselves to the experiment. The next level was “only” 30 volts. Because each increment was small, before they knew it, most people were administering what they believed were dangerously strong shocks. At that point, it was difficult to explain a sudden decision to quit. Participants who resisted early in the study, questioning the procedure, were less likely to become entrapped and more likely to eventually disobey (Modigliani & Rochat, 1995).

Individuals and nations alike are vulnerable to the sneaky process of entrapment. You start dating someone you like moderately; before you know it, you have been together so long that you can’t break up, although you don’t want to become committed, either. Government leaders start a war they think will end quickly. Years later, the nation has lost so many soldiers and so much money that the leaders believe they cannot retreat without losing face.

A chilling study of entrapment was conducted with 25 men who had served in the Greek military police during the authoritarian regime that ended in 1974 (Haritos-Fatouros, 1988). A psychologist who interviewed the men identified the steps used in training them to use torture in questioning prisoners. First the men were ordered to stand guard outside the interrogation and torture cells. Then they stood guard in the detention rooms, where they observed the torture of prisoners. Then they “helped” beat up prisoners. Once they had obediently followed these orders and had become actively involved, the torturers found their actions easier to carry out. The same procedures have been used to train police interrogators to use torture on political opponents and terrorist suspects in places such as Chicago, England, Israel, and Brazil (Conroy, 2000; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, & Zimbardo, 2003).

As Milgram would have predicted, the torturers saw themselves as otherwise “good guys,” just “doing their jobs.” This is a difficult concept for people who divide the world into “good guys” versus “bad guys” and cannot imagine that good guys might do bad things. Yet in everyday life, as in the Milgram study, people often set out on a path that is morally ambiguous, only to find that they have travelled a long way toward violating their own principles. From Greece’s torturers to the Khmer Rouge’s dutiful clerks, from Milgram’s well-meaning volunteers to all of us in our everyday lives, people face the difficult task of “drawing the line.” For many, the demands of the role defeat the inner voice of conscience.



Slot machines rely on the principle of entrapment and on the principles of learning outlined in Chapter 7, both of which are reasons that casinos win millions and most players don’t. A person vows to spend only a few toonies, but after losing them says, “Well, maybe another couple of tries” or “I’ve spent so much, now I really have to win something to get back my loss.”

Quick Quiz

Step into your role as student to answer these questions.

1. What principles were involved in ensuring that people in the Milgram study continued to administer shocks until the highest levels of shock were reached?
2. Which of the following actions by the “learner” reduced the likelihood of being shocked by the “teacher” in Milgram’s study? (a) protesting noisily, (b) screaming in pain, (c) complaining of having a heart ailment, (d) nothing he did made a difference
3. A friend of yours who is moving asks you to bring over a few boxes. Since you are there anyway, he asks you to fill them with books. Before you know it, you have packed up his entire kitchen, living room, and bedroom. What social-psychological process is at work here?
4. How did your answers to the Thinking Critically box on page 266 compare with the actual results of the Milgram and Zimbardo studies? Have your viewpoints changed as a result of learning about these studies?

Answers: 1. allocating responsibility to the authority; routinizing the task; wanting to be polite; and becoming entrapped 2. d 3. entrapment

- What is one of the most common mistakes people make when they explain the behaviour of others?
- Why would a person blame victims of rape or torture for having brought their misfortunes on themselves?
- What is the “Big Lie,” and why does it work so well?
- What is the difference between ordinary techniques of persuasion and the coercive techniques used by cults?

WHAT'S AHEAD

Social Influences on Beliefs

Social psychologists are interested not only in what people do in social situations, but also in what goes on in their heads while they are doing it. Researchers in the area of **social cognition** examine how people’s perceptions of themselves and others affect their relationships, and how the social environment influences thoughts, beliefs, and values. The social environment consists not only of the people around you, but also of your social circumstances, such as whether you live alone or in a family, whether you are a single parent or a partnered one, and the level of your education and income. We will consider two important topics in this area: explanations about behaviour and the formation of attitudes.

Attributions

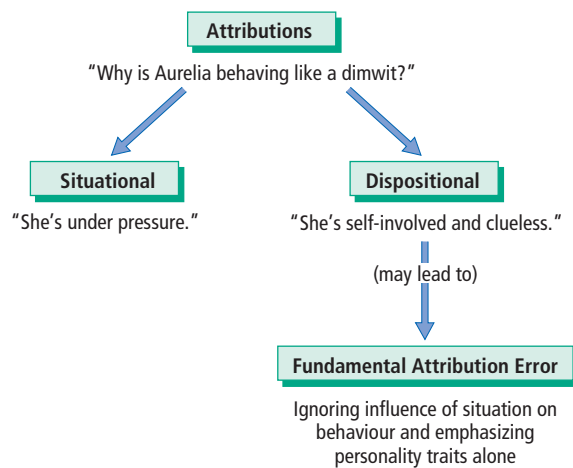
People read detective stories to find out *who* did the dirty deed, but in real life we also want to know *why* people do things—was it because of a terrible childhood, a mental illness, possession by a demon, or what? According to **attribution theory**, the explanations we make of our behaviour and the behaviour of others generally fall into two categories. When we make a *situational attribution*, we are identifying the cause of an action as something in the situation or environment: “Joe stole the money because his family is starving.” When we make a *dispositional attribution*, we are identifying the cause of an action as something in the person, such as a trait or a motive: “Joe stole the money because he is a born thief.”

When people are trying to find reasons for someone else’s behaviour, they reveal a common bias: They tend to overestimate personality traits and underestimate the influence of the situation (Forgas, 1998; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). In terms of attribution theory, they tend to ignore situational attributions in favour of dispositional ones. This tendency has been called the **fundamental attribution error** (sometimes called the *correspondence bias*, because of the underlying assumption that people’s

social cognition An area in social psychology concerned with social influences on thought, memory, perception, and other cognitive processes.

attribution theory The theory that people are motivated to explain their own and others’ behaviour by attributing causes of that behaviour to a situation or disposition.

fundamental attribution error The tendency, in explaining other people’s behaviour, to overestimate personality factors and underestimate the influence of the situation.



dispositions correspond to their behaviour [E. Jones, 1990; Van Boven, Kamada, & Gilovich, 1999]). Were the hundreds of people who obeyed Milgram's experimenters cruel by nature? Were the student guards in the prison study sadistic and the prisoners cowardly? Those who think so are committing the fundamental attribution error.

The impulse to explain other people's behaviour in terms of their personalities is so strong that we do it even when we know that the other person is *required* to behave that way (Yzerbyt et al., 2001). People are especially likely to overlook situational attributions when they are in a good mood and not inclined to think about other people's motives critically, or when they are distracted and preoccupied and don't have time to stop and ask themselves, "Why, exactly, *is* Aurelia behaving like such a dimwit today?" (Forgas, 1998). Instead, they leap to the easiest attribution, which is dispositional: It's all because of her dim personality. They are less likely to wonder if Aurelia has recently joined a group of friends who are encouraging dimwitted behaviour, or is under unusual pressure that is making her act "out of character."

The fundamental attribution error is highly prevalent in Western nations, where middle-class people tend to believe that individuals are responsible for their own actions. In countries such as India, where everyone is embedded in caste and family networks, and in Japan, Korea, China, and Hong Kong, where people are more group oriented than in the West, people are more likely to be aware of situational constraints on behaviour (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Morris & Peng, 1994). Thus, if someone is behaving oddly, makes a mistake, or plays badly in a soccer match, a person from India or China, unlike a Westerner, is more likely to make a situational attribution of the person's behaviour ("He's under pressure") than a dispositional one ("He's incompetent") (Menon et al., 1999).

Westerners do not always prefer dispositional attributions, however. When it comes to explaining their *own* behaviour, they often reveal a **self-serving bias**: They tend to choose attributions that favour them, taking credit for their good actions (a dispositional attribution) but letting the situation account for their bad or embarrassing actions (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). For instance, most Westerners, when angry, will say, "I am furious for good reason—this situation is intolerable." They are less likely to say, "I am furious because I am an ill-tempered grinch." On the other hand, if they do something admirable, such as donating to charity, they are likely to attribute their motives to a personal disposition ("I'm so generous") instead of the situation ("That guy on the phone pressured me into it").

Research performed at the University of British Columbia suggests that culture may affect whether or not we adopt another type of bias: the **group-serving bias**. This term describes our tendency to view the groups to which we belong, or the individuals in these groups, favourably (Heine & Lehman, 1997a). In this study, European-Canadian, Asian-Canadian, and Japanese students were asked to evaluate their university and a member of their family. The researchers observed that the Japanese students consistently evaluated their family member and their university less positively than did the Canadians (regardless of their ethnicity). Thus, the Japanese participants (members of a more collectivist society) did not engage in group-serving biases, at either individual or group levels, whereas the Canadian participants (members of a more individualist society) exhibited group-serving biases at all levels of groups to which they belonged. Thus, some group-serving biases result from the degree to which one's culture is collectivist or individualist.

According to the **just-world hypothesis**, attributions are also affected by the need to believe that the world is fair, that justice prevails, and that good people are rewarded and bad guys are punished. This belief, which is especially prevalent in North America, helps people make sense of senseless events and feel safe in the presence of threatening

self-serving bias The tendency, in explaining our own behaviour, to take credit for our good actions and rationalize our mistakes.

group-serving bias The tendency to explain favourably the behaviours of members of groups to which we belong.

just-world hypothesis The notion that many people need to believe that the world is fair and that justice is served; that bad people are punished and good people rewarded.

Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson



Children learn the value of self-serving attributions at an early age.

events (Lerner, 1980; Hafer & Begue, 2005). Unfortunately, it also leads to a dispositional attribution called *blaming the victim*. If a friend is fired, if a woman is raped, or if an unarmed man at a protest is knowingly shot by a police officer (as happened in the tragic case of Dudley George in Ontario), it is reassuring to think that they all must have done something to deserve what happened or to provoke it: the friend wasn't doing his work, the woman was dressed too "provocatively," the man shouldn't have been protesting in a provincial park. Blaming the victim is virtually universal when people are ordered to harm others or find themselves entrapped into harming others (Bandura, 1999). In the Milgram study, some "teachers" made comments such as, "[The learner] was so stupid and stubborn he deserved to get shocked" (Milgram, 1974). In an innovative series of experiments, Carolyn Hafer of Brock University has found that people who strongly believe that the world is just are more likely to blame the victim than are those who have weaker beliefs in a just world (Hafer, 2000a, 2000b). When their belief in a just world is threatened, such individuals then seek to maintain their belief by finding some reason that the victims deserved what they got (Hafer & Begue, 2005).

Of course, sometimes dispositional (personality) attributions do explain a person's behaviour. The point to remember is that attributions, whether they are accurate or not, have tremendously important consequences. Here's an example that will apply to your own relationships. Happy couples tend to attribute their partners' occasional lapses to something in the situation ("Poor Horace is under a lot of stress"), and the partners' positive actions to stable, internal dispositions ("Horace has the sweetest nature"). But unhappy couples do just the reverse. They attribute lapses to their partners' personalities ("Henry is a hopeless mama's boy") and good behaviour to the situation ("Yeah, he gave me a present, but only because he was told to"). These attributional habits, which can change over time, are strongly related to satisfaction with the partner (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). The attributions you make about your partner, your parents, and your friends will make a big difference in how you get along with them—and how long you will put up with their failings.

THINKING CRITICALLY



Consider Other Interpretations

How do explanations of people's behaviour affect your feelings toward them? Why is it important to "consider other explanations" when someone's actions are annoying you?

Quick Quiz

To what do you attribute your success in answering these questions?

1. What kind of attribution is being made in each case: situational or dispositional? (a) A man says, "My wife has sure become a grouchy person." (b) The same man says, "I'm grouchy because

I've had a bad day at the office." (c) A woman reads that unemployment is high in inner-city communities. "Well, if those people weren't so lazy, they would find work," she says.

2. What principles of attribution theory are suggested by the items in the preceding question?

Answers: 1. (a) dispositional (b) situational (c) dispositional 2. Item (a) illustrates the fundamental attribution error; (b) the self-serving bias; and (c) blaming the victim, possibly because of the just-world hypothesis.

Attitudes

People hold attitudes about all sorts of things—politics, people, food, children, movies, sports heroes, you name it. An *attitude* is a belief about people, groups, ideas, or activities. Some attitudes are *explicit*: We are aware of them, they shape our conscious decisions and actions, and they can be measured on self-report questionnaires. Others are *implicit*: We are unaware of them, they may influence our behaviour in ways we do not recognize, and they are measured in various indirect ways, as we will see later in discussing the attitudes involved in prejudice (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Explicit attitudes tend to reflect recent experiences and conscious beliefs. But implicit attitudes largely stem from past, forgotten events, when you formed your emotional associations toward an activity, event, or group of people (Rudman, 2004).

On most topics, like movies and sports, people easily accept the fact that attitudes range from casual to committed. If your best friend is neutral about hockey and you are an insanely devoted fan, your friendship will probably survive. But when the subject is one involving beliefs that give meaning and purpose to a person's life—most notably, politics and religion—it's another ball game, so to speak. For example, some people regard the traditions of their religion as sacred sources of guidance, which are to be taken literally and which offer the only possible route to salvation. Others regard the precepts of their religion as general guides that are open to interpretation; they accept some rituals and beliefs, but not all of them. Still others find religious beliefs and rituals to be of little personal relevance, or actively rebel against them.

Beyond the Borders

The Origins of Attitudes

Where do attitudes come from? For decades, social psychologists have assumed that all attitudes are learned, acquired from the groups that people belong to, the lessons their parents teach them, the experiences they have, their economic circumstances, and other social and environmental influences. Indeed, many attitudes are acquired in these ways, and they may change when a person has new experiences or moves into different social groups with different values and views.

But some attitudes are not solely a result of learning. In recent years, social psychologists have been drawing on research from behavioural genetics, which has found that some core attitudes stem from personality traits that are highly heritable (Paunonen, 2003; see Chapters 3 and 13). One such trait is “openness to experience.” We would expect people who are open to new experiences to hold positive attitudes toward novelty and change in general—say, in religion, art, music, and events in the larger culture. People who prefer the familiar and conventional would be drawn to conservative politics, religious denominations, and philosophies. And that is what the research is finding.

Religious *affiliation* is not heritable, of course; it depends on a person's family, ethnicity, culture, and social class. But, as studies of twins reared apart have found, *religiosity* does have a genetic component. In a study of liberal and fundamentalist Protestant Christians, the fundamentalists scored much lower than the liberals on the dimension of openness to experience (Streyffeler & McNally, 1998). Likewise, the casual political opinions held by many “swing voters” or people who are politically disengaged are not heritable, but political conservatism has high heritability—.65 in men and .45 in women (Bouchard, 2004; Bouchard & McGue, 2003). When religiosity combines with conservatism and authoritarianism (an unquestioning trust in authority), the result is a deeply ingrained acceptance of tradition and dislike of those who question it (Olson et al., 2001; Saucier, 2000). ●

Perhaps the religious attitude that causes the most controversy and bitterness around the world is the one toward such religious diversity itself—acceptance or intolerance. Some people of all religions accept a world of differing religious views and practices, and believe that church and state should be separate. But for many fundamentalists, religion and politics are inseparable, and they believe that one religion should prevail (Jost et al., 2003). Such intolerance becomes more rigid when religiosity combines with two other personality traits, conservatism and authoritarianism, an unquestioning attitude toward tradition and authority (Saucier, 2000). You can see, then, why the irreconcilable attitudes of religious tolerance and intolerance cause continuing conflict and, in extreme cases, can be used to justify war and terrorism.

Some attitudes and convictions, such as those that arise from the conservatism-authoritarianism-religiosity cluster, are deeply ingrained and difficult to change (Olson et al., 2001). Other attitudes, however, are more flexible, depending on the groups to which you belong, the experiences you have, your economic circumstances, and many other social and environmental influences.

One such influence is your *generational identity*, which reflects the characteristic attitudes and values that result from being a certain age at a certain moment in history. Each generation shares many of the same experiences, such as financial busts or booms, increases or decreases in rates of violence, job and marital opportunities (or the lack of them), technological breakthroughs, war or peace. The ages between 16 and 24 appear to be critical for the formation of a generational identity. The social and political events that occur during these years make deeper impressions and exert more lasting influence than those that happen later in life (Inglehart, 1990; Schuman & Scott, 1989). The Great Depression in the 1930s, the post-war baby boom, and the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s are common components to generational identity. However, others are uniquely Canadian, such as Newfoundland becoming a province in 1949, the development of medicare in the 1950s and 1960s, the adoption of a national flag in 1965, Paul Henderson's game-winning goal in 1972, or Canada's hockey victories at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. It remains to be seen whether the NHL lockout of 2004–05 will number among the generational events that have shaped the identity of Canadians.

Our attitudes dispose us to behave in predictable ways; if you have a positive attitude toward horror movies, you'll choose to go see *Scream*, *The 185th Sequel*. But behaviour also affects our attitudes: If a friend drags you to a horror movie, which you would normally avoid, and you have a terrific time, you might develop a more positive attitude toward such movies. And if you change your familiar social groups, your attitudes might change too. One of the most striking examples of attitude change we can think of is the story of T. J. Leyden, a former white supremacist and skinhead whose idea of fun was once “to beat the hell” out of gay men while calling them vile names. Leyden turned his back on the supremacist world, left everyone he knew who was connected with it (including his neo-Nazi wife), and is now a consultant to the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Task Force Against Hate.

Attitudes also change because of a psychological need for consistency. In Chapter 9, we discuss **cognitive dissonance**, the uncomfortable feeling that occurs when two attitudes, or an attitude and behaviour, are in conflict (are dissonant). To resolve this dissonance, one of those attitudes has to change. For example, if a celebrity you admire does something stupid, immoral, or illegal, you can restore consistency by lowering your opinion of the person. Or you can decide that the person's behaviour wasn't so stupid or immoral after all . . . and besides, everyone else does it too. Usually, people restore cognitive consistency by dismissing evidence that might otherwise throw their fundamental beliefs into question (Aronson, 2004).

cognitive dissonance A state of tension that occurs when a person simultaneously holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, or when a person's belief is incongruent with his or her behaviour.

Some ads are more effective than others. The “I Am Canadian” ad takes advantage of friendly persuasion and patriotism. Note that although sales of Canadian beer improved tremendously following the adoption of the Joe “I Am Canadian” rant, the product itself is not even mentioned in the advertisement . . .



Friendly Persuasion. Most people think that their attitudes are based on thinking, a result of reasoned conclusions and decisions. Sometimes, of course, that’s true! But some attitudes are a result of not thinking at all. Instead, they are a result of social influence—efforts by others to get us to change our minds by using subtle manipulation—and sometimes outright coercion.

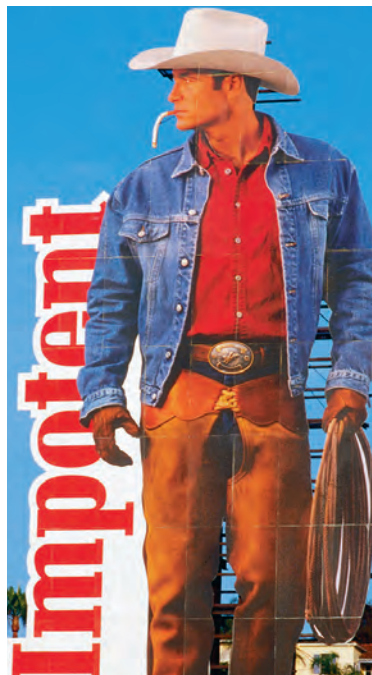
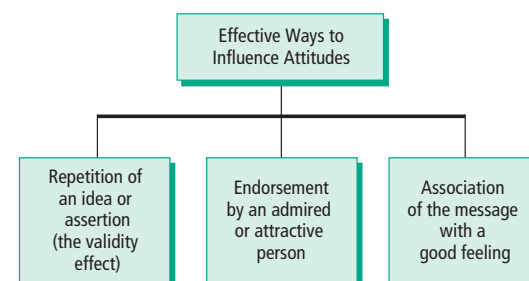
Knowing this, advertisers, politicians, and friends are trying to influence your attitudes every day. One weapon they use is to repeat ideas. Repeated exposure even to a nonsense syllable such as *zug* is enough to make a person feel more positive toward it (Zajonc, 1968). The attitude-boosting effect of merely seeing the same thing repeatedly is a robust phenomenon, replicated across cultures, across species, and across states of consciousness—it works even for stimuli presented below your conscious awareness (Monahan, Murphy, & Zajonc, 2000).

Politicians and advertisers have long known the effectiveness of familiarity: Repeat something often enough, even the basest lie, and eventually the public will believe it. Hitler’s propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, called this technique the “Big Lie.” Its formal name is the **validity effect**.

In a series of experiments, Hal Arkes and his associates demonstrated how the validity effect operates (Arkes, 1993; Arkes, Boehm, & Xu, 1991). In a typical study, people read a list of statements, such as “Mercury has a higher boiling point than copper” or “More than 400 Hollywood films were produced in 1948.” They had to rate each statement for its validity, on a scale of 1 (definitely false) to 7 (definitely true). A week or two later, they again rated the validity of some of these statements and also rated others that they had not seen previously. The result: Mere repetition increased the perception that the familiar statements were true. The same effect also occurred for other kinds of statements, including unverifiable opinions (for example, “At least 75 percent of all politicians are basically dishonest”), opinions that subjects initially felt were true, and even opinions they initially felt were false. “Note that no attempt has been made to persuade,” said Arkes (1993). “No supporting arguments are offered. We just have subjects rate the statements. Mere repetition seems to increase rated validity. This is scary.”

Another effective technique for influencing people’s attitudes is to present arguments by someone who is considered admirable, knowledgeable, or beautiful; this is why advertisements are full of sports heroes, experts, and models (Cialdini, 1993). Persuaders may also try to link their message with a nice, warm, fuzzy feeling. In one early study, students who were given peanuts and Pepsi while listening to a speaker’s point of view were more likely to be convinced by it than were students who listened to the same words without the pleasant munchies and soft drinks (Janis, Kaye, & Kirschner, 1965). This finding has been replicated many times (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992), perhaps explaining why so much business is conducted over lunch, and so many courtships over dinner!

In sum, here are three good ways to influence attitudes:



. . . in contrast, fear tactics to get people to quit doing risky things usually backfire. But perhaps this campaign to persuade men to quit smoking will be the exception!

validity effect The tendency of people to believe that a statement is true or valid simply because it has been repeated many times.

One of the most common ways of trying to change people's attitudes and behaviour, scaring them to death, is actually the least effective. Fear tactics are often used in advertising campaigns to try to persuade people to quit smoking, drive only when sober, use condoms, check for signs of cancer, and prepare for earthquakes. But the use of fear can backfire; it can scare people so much that they become defensive and resist the message ("Don't be silly; that will never happen to me"). Fear tactics are more effective, however, when the message also provides information about how to avoid the danger and if people feel competent to take advantage of this information (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2002; Cialdini, 2001).

Coercive Persuasion. Some manipulators use harsher tactics, not just hoping that people will change their minds but attempting to force them to. These tactics are sometimes referred to as *brainwashing*, but most psychologists prefer the phrase *coercive persuasion*. "Brainwashing" implies that a person has a change of mind and is unaware of what is happening; it sounds mysterious and strange. In fact, the methods involved are neither.

The techniques are *coercive*—that is, they are designed to suppress an individual's ability to reason, think critically, and make choices in his or her own best interests. Studies of religious, political, and other cults have identified some of the key processes of coercive persuasion (Galanter, 1989; Mithers, 1994; Ofshe & Watters, 1994; Singer, 2003; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991):

- 1** *The person is put in situations that result in physical or emotional distress.* The individual may not be allowed to eat, sleep, or exercise; may be isolated in a dark room with no stimulation or food; or may be induced into a trancelike state through repetitive chanting or fatigue.
- 2** *The person's problems are reduced to one simple explanation, which is repeatedly emphasized.* There are as many simplistic explanations as there are cults, but here are two real examples: Are you afraid or unhappy? It all stems from the pain of being born. Are you struggling financially? It's your fault for not fervently wanting to be rich. Members may also be taught to simplify their problems by blaming a particular enemy: Jews, the government, nonbelievers. . . .
- 3** *The leader offers unconditional love, acceptance, and attention.* The new recruit may be given a "love bath" from the group—constant praise and affection. Euphoria and well-being are intense because they typically follow exhaustion and fatigue. In exchange, the leader demands everyone's adoration and obedience.
- 4** *A new identity based on the group is created.* The recruit is told that he is part of the chosen, the elite, or the saved. To foster this new identity, many cults require their members to wear special clothes or eat special diets, and they assign each member a new name.
- 5** *The person is subjected to entrapment.* At first, the new member agrees only to do small things, but gradually the demands increase: for example, to spend a weekend with the group, then another weekend, then take weekly seminars, then take advanced courses, then contribute money. . . .
- 6** *The person's access to information is severely controlled.* As soon as a person is a committed believer or follower, the group limits the person's choices, denigrates critical thinking, makes fun of doubts, and insists that any private distress is due to lack of belief in the group. Total conformity is demanded. The person may be physically isolated from the outside world and thus from antidotes to the leader's ideas. In many groups, members are required to break all ties with their parents, who

These members of the Aum Shinrikyo (“Supreme Truth”) sect in Japan, wearing masks of their leader’s face, take the uniformity of cult identity to an extreme. The group’s founder instructed his devotees to place a nerve gas in a Japanese subway, which killed 10 and injured thousands of other passengers. One former member said of the sect, “Their strategy is to wear you down and take control of your mind. They promise you heaven, but they make you live in hell.”



are the strongest link to the members’ former world and thus the greatest threat to the leader’s control.

Many of the rituals associated with organized sports also use tactics of coercive persuasion. For instance, the lifestyle required of top athletes in our country often involves hazing and team cohabitation, frequently resulting in little time to socialize with non-team members. Furthermore, many athletes will take coercive persuasion to the next level and will deliberately harm themselves. That is, they will take steroids, engage in unsafe needle-sharing practices, and continue to compete while injured because they do not want to succumb to weakness. It is interesting to note that these are culturally acceptable behaviours in Canada when they are associated with sports, despite sharing many similarities with behaviours associated with culturally unacceptable cult membership.

Every few years another cult makes the news when its leader has a “vision” and, for one reason or another, calls upon his followers to kill themselves. For instance, between 1994 and 1997 more than 70 members of the Order of the Solar Temple either committed mass suicide or engaged in murder-suicide, including more than 30 men, women, and children in Quebec. Cult leaders Luc Jouret and Joseph di Mambro persuaded their followers that if they committed suicide, they would be reborn on the star Sirius and avoid the imminent destruction of the earth. Neither of these leaders ever said to new recruits, “If you follow me, you will eventually give up your marriages, homes, children, and your lives”; but by the end, that is just what all of them did.

Although some people may be more vulnerable than others to coercive influence, these techniques are powerful enough to overwhelm even mentally healthy and well-educated individuals. For example, research on contemporary suicide bombers in the Middle East shows that they usually have no psychopathology and are often quite educated and affluent (Silke, 2003). Although people who become suicide bombers are idealistic and angry about perceived injustices, they take extreme measures because they have become entrapped in closed groups led by charismatic leaders (Atran, 2003). Thus, the first line of defence against coercive persuasion is to dispel people’s illusion of invulnerability to these tactics (Sagarin et al., 2002). Another is to teach people how to articulate and defend their own positions and think critically. These skills prepare people to resist propaganda and make them less vulnerable to manipulation by others (Tormala & Petty, 2002).

Quick Quiz

Now, how can we persuade you to take this quiz without using coercive techniques?

1. A politician spends \$3 million to make sure his name is seen and heard frequently and to repeat unverified charges that his opponent is a thief. What psychological process is he relying on to win?

2. Your best friend urges you to join a “life-renewal” group called The Feeling Life. Your friend has been spending increasing amounts of time with her fellow Feelies, and you have some doubts about them. What questions would you want to have answered before joining up?

Answers: 1. the validity effect 2. A few things to consider: Is there an autocratic leader who tolerates no dissent or criticism, while rationalizing this practice as a benefit for members? (“Doubt and disbelief are signs that your feeling side is being repressed.”) Have long-standing members given up their families, interests, and ambitions for this group? Does the leader offer simple but unrealistic promises to repair your life and all that troubles you? Are members required to make extreme sacrifices by donating large amounts of money?

- Why do people in groups often go along with the majority even when the majority is dead wrong?
- In an emergency, are you more likely to get help when there are many strangers in the area or only a few?
- What enables some people to be nonconformists, help others at risk to themselves, or blow the whistle on wrongdoers?

WHAT'S AHEAD

Individuals in Groups

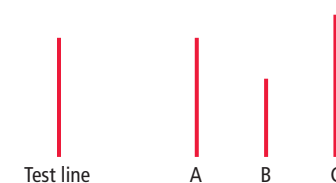
Even when a group is not coercive, something happens to us when we join a bunch of other people. We act differently than we would on our own, regardless of whether the group has convened to solve problems and make decisions, has gathered to have fun, consists of anonymous bystanders or members of an internet chat room, or is just a loose collection of individuals hanging out in a bar. The decisions we make and the actions we take in groups may depend less on our personal desires than on the structure and dynamics of the group itself.

Conformity

One thing that people in groups do is conform, taking action or adopting attitudes as a result of real or imagined group pressure.

Suppose that you are required to appear at a psychology laboratory for an experiment on perception. You join seven other students seated in a room. You are shown a 25-centimetre line and asked which of three other lines is identical to it. The correct answer, line A, is obvious, so you are amused when the first person in the group chooses line B. “Bad eyesight,” you say to yourself. “He’s off by 5 whole centimetres!” The second person also chooses line B. “What a dope,” you think. But by the time the fifth person has chosen line B, you are beginning to doubt yourself. The sixth and seventh students also choose line B, and now you are worried about *your* eyesight. The experimenter looks at you. “Your turn,” he says. Do you follow the evidence of your own eyes or the collective judgment of the group?

This was the design for a series of famous studies of conformity conducted by Solomon Asch (1952, 1965). The seven “nearsighted” students were actually Asch’s confederates. Asch wanted to know what people would do when a group unanimously contradicted an obvious fact. He found that when people first made the line



individualist cultures Cultures in which individual goals and wishes are prized above duty to and relations with others.

collectivist cultures Cultures in which harmony with one's group is prized above individual goals and wishes.

comparisons on their own, they were almost always accurate. But in the group, only 20 percent of the students remained completely independent on every trial, and often they apologized for not agreeing with the group. One-third conformed to the group's incorrect decision more than half of the time, and the rest conformed at least some of the time. Whether or not they conformed, the students often felt uncertain of their decision. As one participant later said, "I felt disturbed, puzzled, separated, like an outcast from the rest."

Asch's experiment has been replicated many times over the years, in Canada and other countries. Conformity has declined since the 1950s, when Asch first did his work, suggesting that conformity reflects social norms, which can change over time (Bond & Smith, 1996). Conformity varies with cultural norms, too. People in **individualist cultures**, such as Canada, value individual rights and place the "self" above duty to others; people in **collectivist cultures**, such as many Asian societies, regard duty and social harmony as more important than individual rights or happiness (Kim & Markus, 1999). (In Chapter 13, we discuss this important difference between cultures in more detail.)

For example, as researchers Heejung Kim and Hazel Markus (1999) point out, a Canadian at a Tim Hortons in Halifax might order a double-double (if you don't know what this is, go try one! Okay, it's coffee with double cream, double sugar), enjoying the pleasure of making such an individualist choice. A person who orders the same drink in Seoul, Korea, however, may feel uncomfortable. That is, uniqueness has positive connotations to North Americans; it means freedom and independence. Conversely, conformity has positive connotations to Koreans; it means connectedness and harmony.

Regardless of culture, however, everyone conforms under some circumstances, and they do so for all sorts of reasons. Some do so because they identify with group members and want to be like them in dress, attitudes, or behaviour. Some want to be liked and know that disagreeing with a group can make them unpopular. Some believe the group has knowledge that is superior to their own. And some conform out of self-interest, to keep their jobs, get promoted, or win votes. Also, it is not so easy to be a nonconformist! Group members are often uncomfortable with deviants and will try to persuade them to conform. If pleasant persuasion fails, the group may punish, isolate, or reject the deviant (Moscovici, 1985).



Sometimes people like to conform in order to feel part of the group . . . and sometimes they like to assert their individuality.

Like obedience, conformity has both a positive and a negative side. Society runs more smoothly when people know how to behave in a given situation, and when they share the same attitudes and manners. Most people like to feel that they are liked by others in their group and able to get along with them. Conformity in dress, preferences, and ideas confers a sense of being “in sync” with one’s group, and marks a person as being part of that group. But conformity can also suppress critical thinking and creativity. In a group, many people will deny their private beliefs, agree with silly notions, and even repudiate their own values.

The Anonymous Crowd

Suppose that you were in trouble on a city street or another public place—say, being mugged or having a sudden appendicitis attack. Do you think you would be more likely to get help if (a) one other person was passing by, (b) several other people were in the area, or (c) dozens of people were in the area? Most people would choose the third answer, on the grounds that the more people who are available to help, the more likely it is that someone will step forward. But that is not how people operate. On the contrary, the more people there are around you, the *less* likely it is that one of them will come to your aid. Why?

Diffusion of Responsibility. The answer has to do with a common group process called the **diffusion of responsibility**, in which responsibility for an outcome is diffused, or spread, among many people. In crowds, individuals often fail to take action because they believe that someone else will do so. For example, in London, England, four teenagers repeatedly stabbed a 10-year-old immigrant boy from Nigeria. As many as 10 people saw this happen but did not stop to help or phone the police. The boy dragged himself to an open stairwell, where he bled to death.

The many reports of *bystander apathy* in the news, like this one, reflect the diffusion of responsibility. When others are near, people fail to call for help or come to the aid of a person in trouble. People are more likely to come to a stranger’s aid if they are the only ones around to help, because responsibility cannot be diffused.

In work groups, the diffusion of responsibility sometimes takes the form of *social loafing*: Each member of a team slows down, letting others work harder (Karau & Williams, 1993; Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). Social loafing occurs when individual group members are not accountable for the work they do, when people feel that working harder would only duplicate their colleagues’ efforts, when workers feel that others are getting a “free ride,” or when the work itself is uninteresting (Shepperd, 1995). When the challenge of the job is increased or when each member of the group has a different, important job to do, the sense of individual responsibility rises and social loafing declines (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989; Hart, Bridgett, & Karau, 2001; Williams & Karau, 1991).

Deindividuation. The most extreme instances of the diffusion of responsibility occur in large, anonymous mobs or crowds—whether they are cheerful ones, such as sports spectators, or angry ones, such as rioters. In crowds like these, people often lose all awareness of their individuality and seem to hand themselves over to the mood and actions of the crowd, a state called **deindividuation** (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952). You are more likely to feel deindividuated in a large city, where no one recognizes you, than in a small town, where it is hard to hide. (You are also more likely to feel deindividuated in large classes, where you might—mistakenly!—think you are invisible to the teacher, than in small ones.) Sometimes organizations actively promote the deindividuation of their members in order to enhance conformity and allegiance to

diffusion of responsibility In organized or anonymous groups, the tendency of members to avoid taking responsibility for actions or decisions, assuming that others will do so.

deindividuation In groups or crowds, the loss of awareness of one’s own individuality.



People in crowds, feeling anonymous, often seem to “forget themselves” and do destructive things they would never do on their own. Most likely these Calgary Flames hockey fans, shown here along the “Red Mile” during the 2004 Stanley Cup finals, would not normally defy police officers in this fashion.

the group. This is an important function of uniforms or masks, which eliminate each member’s distinctive identity.

Deindividuation has long been considered a prime reason for mob violence. According to this explanation, because deindividuated people in crowds “forget themselves” and do not feel accountable for their actions, they are more likely to violate social norms and laws than they would on their own: breaking store windows, looting, getting into fights, rioting at a sports event. Their usual inhibitions against aggressiveness are weakened. Deindividuation can occur in response to both negative and positive events. Think of the wild behaviour on the “Red Mile” in Calgary following each victory of the Flames during the Stanley Cup playoffs. These behaviours occurred because these individuals were conforming to the “let’s party!” norms of their fellow fans. Crowd norms can also foster helpfulness, especially following natural disasters such as the tsunami that hit Indonesia and Sri Lanka, when strangers helped the victims with donations of food, clothes, time, and money. What really seems to be happening when people are in large crowds or anonymous situations is not that they become “mindless” or “uninhibited.” Rather, they become more likely to conform to the norms of the *specific situation* (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

Many studies have indeed found that deindividuation increases a person’s willingness to harm a stranger, cheat, or break the law (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2002). Deindividuation even eliminates gender differences in aggressiveness. In two studies, men behaved more aggressively than women in a competitive video war game when they were individuated—that is, when their names and background information about them were spoken aloud, heard by all participants, and recorded publicly by the experimenter. But when the men and women believed they were anonymous to their fellow students and to the experimenter—that is, when they were deindividuated—they did not differ in how aggressively they played the game (Lightdale & Prentice, 1994).

Two classic experiments illustrate the power of the situation to influence what deindividuated people will do. In one, women who wore Ku Klux Klan-like disguises that completely covered their faces and bodies (see the photo on the next page) delivered twice as much apparent electric shock to another woman as did women who were not only undisguised but also wore large name tags (Zimbardo, 1970). In a second, women who were wearing nurses’ uniforms gave *less* shock than did women in regular dress (Johnson & Downing, 1979). Evidently, the KKK disguise was a signal to behave aggressively; the nurses’ uniforms were a signal to nurture.

Anonymity and Responsibility. Deindividuation has important legal as well as psychological implications. Should individuals in a crowd be held accountable for their harmful “deindividuated” behaviour? Consider a trial held in South Africa in the late 1980s, in which six black residents of an impoverished township were accused of murdering an 18-year-old black woman who was having an affair with a hated black police officer. Members of the crowd “necklaced” the woman—placed a tire around her neck and set it afire—during a community protest against the police. The crowd danced and sang as she burned to ashes.

> Get Involved

Losing Yourself

For this exercise in deindividuation, choose two situations: one in which you are one of many people, perhaps hundreds (as in a large classroom or a concert audience); and one in which you are one of a few (as in a small discussion group). In both situations, close your eyes and pretend to fall asleep. Is this easier to do in one context than the other? Why? In each case, what is the reaction of other people around you?



THINKING CRITICALLY

Examine the Evidence

How mindless are “mindless” crowds? Should deindividuation be a legitimate excuse for people who loot, rape, or commit murder because the mob is doing it?

The six men were convicted of murder, but their sentence was commuted to 20 months of prison when a British social psychologist, Andrew Colman (1991), testified that deindividuation should reduce the “moral blameworthiness” of their behaviour. The young men were swept up in the mindless behaviour of the crowd, he argued, and hence not fully responsible for their actions. Do you agree? An African social scientist, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (1994), did not. She interviewed some of the men accused of the necklacing and found they were not so mindless after all. Some were tremendously upset, were well aware of their actions, had debated the woman’s guilt, had thought about running away, and had consciously tried to rationalize their behaviour. Moreover, she argued, we must remember that in every crowd, some people do not go along; they remain mindful of their own values.

And so, should the deindividuation excuse, like the “I was only following orders” excuse, exonerate a person of responsibility for looting, rape, or murder? If so, to what degree? What do you think?



Wearing a uniform or disguise can increase deindividuation.

Quick Quiz

On your own, take responsibility for identifying which phenomenon discussed in the previous section is illustrated in the following situations:

1. You are at a costume party wearing a silly gorilla suit. When you see a chance to play a practical joke on the host, you do it.

2. Walking down a busy street, you see that fire has broken out in a store window. “Someone must have phoned the fire department,” you say.

Answers: 1. deindividuation 2. diffusion of responsibility

Altruism and Dissent

We have seen how social roles, norms, and pressures to obey authority and conform to a group can cause people to behave in ways they might not otherwise do. Yet, throughout history, men and women have disobeyed orders they believed to be immoral and have gone against prevailing beliefs; their actions have changed the course of history. For instance, until 1929, the government of Canada defined a person entitled to vote in this country as “A male person, including an Indian, excluding a Mongolian or Chinese. . . . No woman, idiot, lunatic or criminal shall vote.” Pioneers such as Nellie McClung, Mary Irene Parlby, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Louise Edwards, and Louise McKinney fought for the right of Canadian women to become persons, a legal status that would grant them the right to vote, hold political office, and take a more active role in society. Similarly, indigenous peoples’ leaders, such as Matthew Coon Come, are working to ensure self-determination, which would result in autonomous communities within Canada, rather than dependence on Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. In trying to ensure these rights for indigenous peoples, protesters have clashed with police and occupied lands in dispute.

Dissent and *altruism*, the willingness to take selfless or dangerous action on behalf of others, are in part a matter of personal convictions and conscience. However, just as there are situational reasons for obedience and conformity, so there are situational



Conflicts between indigenous peoples of Canada and the Canadian government regarding their right to self-government have occurred in a number of instances, such as Quebec's Oka crisis of 1990. Typically, these examples of disobedience and dissent revolve around the right to self-govern, self-educate, and determine their own future.

influences on a person's decision to speak up for an unpopular opinion, choose conscience over conformity, or help a stranger in trouble. Here are some of the steps involved in deciding to "rock the boat" or behave courageously, and some social and cultural factors involved in them:

1 *You perceive the need for intervention or help.* It may seem obvious, but before you can take independent action, you must realize that such action is necessary. Sometimes people willfully blind themselves to wrongdoing to justify their own inaction ("I'm just minding my business here"; "I have no idea what they're doing over there at that camp"). But blindness to the need for action also occurs when a situation imposes too many demands on people's attention. Residents of densely populated cities cannot stop to offer help to everyone who seems to need it; they would never have time to do anything else (Levine et al., 1994).

2 *The situation increases the likelihood that you will take responsibility.* When you are in a large crowd or in a large organization, it is easy to avoid action because of the diffusion of responsibility. Conversely, when you are in an environment that rewards independent thinking and dissent and discourages social loafing, you may behave accordingly.

3 *Cultural norms encourage you to take action.* Some cultures place a higher value on helping strangers than other cultures do. Community-oriented Hindus in India, for example, believe that people are obligated to help anyone who needs it—parent, friend, or stranger—even if the need is minor. In contrast, individualistic North Americans do not feel as obligated to help friends and strangers, or even parents who merely have "minor" needs (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). In studies of strangers' helpfulness to one another across 55 cities around the world, cultural norms were more important than population density in predicting levels of helpfulness (Levine, 2003).

4 *The cost-benefit ratio supports your decision to get involved.* It is easier to be a whistle-blower or to protest a company policy when you know you can find another job, but what if jobs in your field are scarce and you have a family to support? People are less likely to take an independent action if the personal, physical, or financial costs to them are high. The cost of helping or protesting might be embarrassment and wasted time or, more seriously, lost income, lost friends, and even physical danger. The cost of not helping or remaining silent might be guilt, blame from others, loss of honour, or in some tragic cases, the injury or death of others.

Sadly, the costs of dissent and honesty are often high. Most whistle-blowers, far from being rewarded for their bravery, are punished for it. In fact, studies of whistle-blowers find that one-half to two-thirds lose their jobs and have to leave their professions entirely. Many lose their homes and families (Alford, 2001).

5 *You have an ally.* In Asch's conformity experiment, the presence of one other person who gave the correct answer was enough to overcome agreement with the majority. In Milgram's experiment, the presence of a peer who disobeyed the experimenter's instruction to shock the learner sharply increased the number of people who also disobeyed. One dissenting member of a group may be viewed as a troublemaker and two dissenting members as a conspiracy, but several are a coalition. An ally reassures a person of the rightness of the protest, and their combined efforts may eventually persuade the majority (Wood et al., 1994).

6 *You become entrapped.* Once having taken the initial step of getting involved, most people will increase their commitment. In one study, nearly 9000 federal employees were asked whether they had observed wrongdoing at work, whether they

told anyone about it, and what happened if they had told. Nearly half of the sample had observed some serious cases of wrongdoing, such as stealing federal funds, accepting bribes, or creating a situation that was dangerous to public safety. Of that half, 72 percent had done nothing at all, but the other 28 percent reported the problem to their immediate supervisors. Once they had taken that step, a majority of the whistleblowers eventually took the matter to higher authorities (Graham, 1986).

When you think of a hero, are these the types of individuals who come to mind? Or does your prototype of hero involve running into a burning building to rescue someone? The Carnegie Hero Fund awards prizes to people who risk their lives to save another's (usually a stranger). Interestingly, only 9 percent of these awards have gone to women, perhaps in part because this type of heroism is traditionally expected of men. However, women appear to engage in other kinds of heroism as frequently as or more often than men. For instance, during the Holocaust, women in France, Poland, and the Netherlands were as likely as men to risk their lives to save Jewish people; women are more likely than men to donate an organ such as a kidney to save another person's life; and women are more likely to volunteer to serve in dangerous postings around the world in organizations such as Medecins Sans Frontières (Becker & Eagly, 2004). However, these types of heroic acts are not often formally recognized as such, presumably excluding these individuals from awards.

As you can see, certain social and cultural factors make altruism, disobedience, and dissent more likely to occur, just as other factors suppress them. This is why people behave inconsistently across situations. A woman may blow the whistle on her company for failing to observe worker-safety precautions, yet conform to the opinions of others when she serves on a jury, even though she disagrees with the verdict. How do you think you would behave if you were faced with a conflict between social pressure and conscience? Would you phone 911 if you saw someone being injured in a fight? Would you voice your true opinion in class even though everyone else seemed to disagree? What aspects of the situation and your culture's norms would influence your responses?



Some people behave selflessly to help others, even at risk to their own lives or jobs. Although we are used to wild weather in Canada, in 2004 we had our share of catastrophes—massive flooding in Peterborough, Ontario (above); Hurricane Juan, which caused a blizzard in Halifax; and the massive rain, hail, and wind that ripped the roof off the West Edmonton Mall. During all of these events, numerous nameless individuals risked their lives and helped out with donations of time and money.

Quick Quiz

Imagine that you are chief executive officer of a new electric-car company. You want your employees to feel free to offer their suggestions for improving productivity and satisfaction, and to

inform managers if they find any evidence that your cars are unsafe, even if that means delaying production. What concepts from this chapter could you use in setting company policy?

Answer: Some possibilities: You could encourage and acknowledge deviant ideas, and not require unanimity of group decisions; reward individual innovation and suggestions by paying attention to them and implementing the best ones (to avoid social loafing and deindividuation); stimulate commitment to the task (building a car that will solve the world's pollution problem); establish a written policy to protect whistleblowers. . . . What else can you think of?

- In what different ways do people balance their ethnic identity and their membership in the larger culture?
- What is an effective antidote for “us–them” thinking?
- How do stereotypes benefit us, and how do they distort reality?

WHAT'S AHEAD

Us versus Them: Group Identity and Conflict

Each of us develops a personal identity that is based on our particular traits and unique life history. But we also develop **social identities** based on the groups we belong to, including our national, religious, political, and occupational groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identities are important because they give us a sense of place and position in the world. Without them, most of us would feel like loose marbles rolling around in an unconnected universe. It feels good to be part of an “us.” But does that mean that we must automatically feel superior to “them”?

Ethnic Identity

In multicultural societies such as Canada, different social identities sometimes collide. In particular, people often face the dilemma of balancing an **ethnic identity**, a close identification with a religious or ethnic group, and **acculturation**, identification with the dominant culture (Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1996; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). The hallmarks of having an ethnic identity are that you identify with the group, feel proud to be a member, feel emotionally attached to the group, and behave in ways that conform to the group’s rules, values, and norms—for example, in what you wear, what you eat, and what customs you observe (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

There are four ways of balancing ethnic identity and acculturation, depending on whether ethnic identity is strong or weak and whether identification with the larger culture is strong or weak (Berry, 1994; Phinney, 1990).

People who are *bicultural* have strong ties both to their ethnicity and to the larger culture: They say, “I am proud of my ethnic heritage, but I identify just as much with my country.” They can alternate easily between their culture of origin and the majority culture, slipping into the customs and language of each as circumstances dictate. People who choose *assimilation* have weak feelings of ethnicity but a strong sense of acculturation: Their attitude, for example, might be “I’m a Canadian, period.” *Ethnic separatists* have a strong sense of ethnic identity but weak feelings of acculturation: They may say, “My ethnicity comes first; if I join the mainstream, I’m betraying my origins and selling out.” And some people feel *marginal*, connected to neither their ethnicity nor the dominant culture: They do not want to identify with any ethnic or national group, or they feel that they don’t belong anywhere.

A person’s degree of acculturation may change throughout life in response to experiences and societal events. For example, many immigrants arrive in Canada with every intention of becoming “true” Canadians. If they encounter discrimination or setbacks, however, they may decide that acculturation is harder than they anticipated or that ethnic separatism offers greater solace. In any case, acculturation is rarely a complete accommodation to mainstream culture. Many individuals pick and choose among the values, food, traditions, and customs of the mainstream culture, while also keeping aspects of their heritage that are important to their self-identity (Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2002; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

It is a sign of our multiethnic times that many people are now refusing to be pigeonholed into any single historical ethnic category. In 1996, more than 10 million people reported having multiple ethnic origins on the census (Statistics Canada, 1998). As an aside, the 2001 census reported that nearly 11 million people listed their ethnicity as Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2003)! Compare this to the 5.3 million people who answered this way on the 1996 census (the first time that this category was available).

social identity The part of a person’s self-concept that is based on his or her identification with a nation, culture, or ethnic group or with gender or other roles in society.

ethnic identity A person’s close identification with a religious or ethnic group, often related to traditional family customs and practices.

acculturation Identification with the dominant culture.

You should know that most of the respondents in the 1996 and 2001 censuses were born in Canada; thus, for these 18 million Canadians who were born in Canada, ethnicity may not even reflect where they were born!

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's own culture or ethnic group is superior to all others, is universal, probably because it aids survival by making people feel attached to their own group and willing to work on the group's behalf. Ethnocentrism is even embedded in some languages: The Chinese word for China means "the centre of the world," and the Navajo and the Inuit call themselves simply "The People." Does the fact that we feel good about our own culture, nationality, gender, or school mean that we have to regard other groups as inferior? Social and cultural psychologists strive to identify the conditions that promote harmony or conflict, understanding or prejudice, between groups.

Being in a group confers an immediate social identity: us. As soon as people have created a category called "us," however, they invariably perceive everybody else as "not-us." This in-group solidarity can be manufactured in a minute in a laboratory, as Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (1971) demonstrated in an experiment with British schoolboys. Tajfel showed the boys slides with varying numbers of dots on them and asked the boys to guess how many dots there were. The boys were arbitrarily told they were "overestimators" or "underestimators" and were then asked to work on another task. In this phase, they had the chance to award points to other boys identified as overestimators or underestimators. Although each boy worked alone in his own cubicle, almost every single one assigned far more points to boys he thought were like him, an overestimator or an underestimator. As the boys emerged from their rooms, they were asked, "Which were you?"—and the answers received a mix of cheers and boos from the others.

Us–them social identities are strengthened when two groups compete with one another. Years ago, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues used a natural setting, a boys' camp called Robber's Cave, to demonstrate the effects of competition on hostility and conflict between groups (Sherif, 1958; Sherif et al., 1961). Sherif randomly assigned 11- and 12-year-old boys to two groups, the Eagles and the Rattlers. Prior to assigning the boys to these groups, a number of them were friendly with each other. Once they were assigned to groups, however, things began to change. To build a sense of in-group identity and team spirit, Sherif had each group work together on projects such as making a rope bridge and building a diving board. He then put the Eagles and Rattlers in competition for prizes. During fierce games of football, baseball, and tug-of-war, the boys whipped up a competitive fever that soon spilled off the playing fields. They began to raid each other's cabins, call each other names, and start fist fights. Few dared to have a friend from the rival group. Before long, the Rattlers and the Eagles were as hostile toward each other as any two gangs fighting for turf or any two nations fighting for dominance. Their hostility continued even when they were just sitting around together watching movies.

Then Sherif decided to try to undo the hostility he had created and make peace between the Eagles and Rattlers. He and his associates set up a series of predicaments in which both groups needed to work together to reach a desired goal—pooling their resources to get a movie they all wanted to see, or pulling a staff truck up a hill on a camping trip. This policy of *interdependence in reaching mutual goals* was highly successful in reducing the boys' competitiveness and hostility; the boys eventually made friends with their former enemies (see Figure 8.2).

ethnocentrism The belief that one's own ethnic group, nation, or religion is superior to all others.

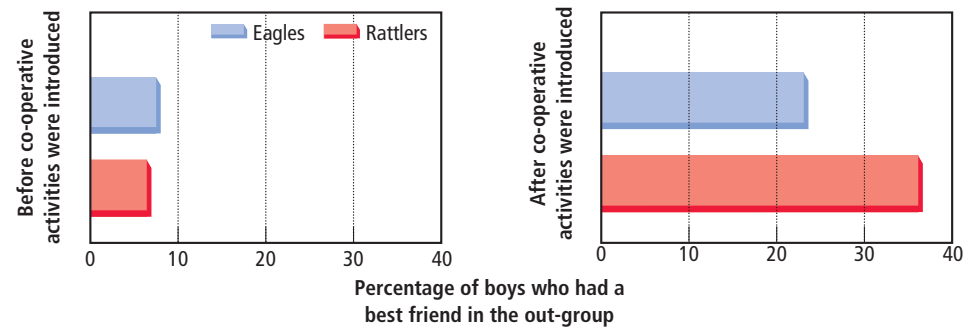


Even Canadians are ethnocentric!

Figure 8.2

THE EXPERIMENT AT ROBBER'S CAVE

In this study, competitive games fostered hostility between the Rattlers and the Eagles. Few boys had a best friend from the other group. But after the boys had to co-operate to solve various problems, the percentage who made friends across “enemy lines” shot up (Sherif et al., 1961).



stereotype A summary impression of a group, in which a person believes that all members of the group share a common trait or traits (positive, negative, or neutral).

Interdependence has a similar effect in adult groups. The reason, it seems, is that co-operation causes people to think of themselves as members of one big group—a new social identity—instead of two opposed groups, *us* and *them* (Gaertner et al., 1990).

Stereotypes

You can probably think of a million ways that members of your family vary—Riaz is stodgy, Jennifer is prissy, Sandy is outgoing. But if you have never met a person from Turkey or Tibet, you are likely to *stereotype* Turks and Tibetans. A **stereotype** is a summary impression of a group of people in which all members of the group are viewed as sharing a common trait or traits. Stereotypes may be negative, positive, or neutral. There are stereotypes of people who drive Jeeps or BMWs, of men who wear earrings and of women who wear business suits, of engineering students and art students, of feminists and fraternity men.

Stereotypes play an important role in human thinking. They help us quickly process new information and retrieve memories. They allow us to organize experience, make sense of differences among individuals and groups, and predict how people will behave. Stereotypes aren't necessarily bad. They are, as some psychologists have called them, useful “tools in the mental toolbox”—energy-saving devices that allow us to make efficient decisions (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000).

Although stereotypes reflect real differences among people, they also distort that reality in three ways (Judd et al., 1995). First, *they exaggerate differences between groups*, making the stereotyped group seem odd, unfamiliar, or dangerous, not like “us.” Second, *they produce selective perception*; people tend to see only the evidence that fits the stereotype and reject any perceptions that do not fit. Third, *they underestimate differences within other groups*. People realize that their own groups are made up of all kinds of individuals, but stereotypes create the impression that all members of other groups are the same.

Cultural values affect how people evaluate the actions of another group. Chinese students in Hong Kong, where communalism and respect for elders are valued, think that a student who comes late to class or argues with a parent about grades



Which woman is the chemical engineer and which is the assistant? The Western stereotype holds that (a) women are not engineers in the first place, but (b) if they are, they are Western. Actually, the engineer at this refinery is the Kuwaiti woman on the left.

is being selfish and disrespectful of adults. But Australian students, who value individualism, think that the same behaviour is perfectly appropriate (Forgas & Bond, 1985). You can see how the Chinese might form negative stereotypes of “disrespectful” Australians, and how the Australians might form negative stereotypes of the “spineless” Chinese. And it is a small step from negative stereotypes to prejudice.

Quick Quiz

Do you have a positive or a negative stereotype of quizzes?

1. Frank, an Asian university student, finds himself caught between two philosophies on his campus. One holds that Asians should move toward full integration into mainstream culture. The other holds that Asians should immerse themselves in the history, values, and contributions of their traditional culture. The first group values _____ whereas the second emphasizes _____.
2. John knows and likes the Mexican minority in his town, but he privately believes that Anglo culture is superior to all others. His belief is evidence of his _____.
3. What strategy does the Robber's Cave study suggest for reducing "us–them" thinking and hostility between groups?

Answers: 1. acculturation, ethnic identity 2. ethnocentrism 3. interdependence in reaching mutual goals

WHAT'S AHEAD

- Is prejudice more likely to be a cause of war or a result of it?
- If you believe that women are naturally better than men, are you "sexist"?
- Can you be unconsciously prejudiced even though you think you aren't?
- Why isn't mere contact between cultural groups enough to reduce prejudice between them? What does work?

Group Conflict and Prejudice

A *prejudice* consists of a negative stereotype and a strong, unreasonable dislike or hatred of a group or its individual members. Feelings of prejudice violate the spirit of critical thinking because they resist rational argument and evidence. In his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport (1954/1979) described the responses characteristic of a prejudiced person when confronted with evidence contradicting his beliefs:

Mr. X: The trouble with Jews is that they only take care of their own group.

Mr. Y: But the record of the Community Chest campaign shows that they give more generously, in proportion to their numbers, to the general charities of the community, than do non-Jews.

Mr. X: That shows they are always trying to buy favour and intrude into Christian affairs. They think of nothing but money; that is why there are so many Jewish bankers.

Mr. Y: But a recent study shows that the percentage of Jews in the banking business is negligible, far smaller than the percentage of non-Jews.

Mr. X: That's just it; they don't go in for respectable business; they are only in the movie business or run nightclubs.

Notice that Mr. X does not respond to Mr. Y's evidence; he just moves along to another reason for his dislike of Jews. That is the slippery nature of prejudice.

The Origins of Prejudice

When social psychologists began to study prejudice in earnest after the Second World War, they regarded prejudice as a form of mental illness: Only disturbed, mentally unhealthy people, they thought, could be prejudiced. (They were thinking of Hitler.) Since then, they have learned that, on the contrary, prejudice is a universal human experience

that affects just about every human being (Dovidio, 2001). The reason is that prejudice has many sources and functions: psychological, social-cultural, and economic.

1 *Psychological functions.* Prejudice often serves to ward off feelings of doubt and fear. Prejudiced persons may transfer their worries onto the target group. Thus, a person who has doubts or anxieties about his own sexuality may develop a hatred of gay people. Prejudice also allows people to use the target group as a scapegoat: “Those people are the source of all my troubles.” And, as research from many nations has confirmed, prejudice is a tonic for low self-esteem. People puff up their own feelings of low self-worth by disliking groups they see as inferior (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan et al., 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

2 *Social and cultural functions.* Some prejudices are acquired through social pressures to conform to the views of friends, relatives, or associates. Rather than having deep-seated psychological roots, some social prejudices are passed along mindlessly from one generation to another, as when parents communicate to their children that “We don’t associate with people like that.” And some unconscious (implicit) prejudices are acquired from advertising, TV shows, and news reports that contain derogatory images and stereotypes of certain groups.

Prejudice also serves cultural purposes, bonding people to their own ethnic or national group and its ways. Indeed, this may be a major evolutionary reason for its universality and persistence (Fishbein, 1996). In this respect, prejudice is the flip side of ethnocentrism; it is not only that we are good and kind, but also that they are bad or evil. By disliking “them,” we feel closer to others who are like “us.”

3 *Economic functions.* Prejudice makes official forms of discrimination seem legitimate, by justifying the majority group’s dominance, status, or greater wealth (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Historically, for example, white men in positions of power have justified their exclusion of women, blacks, and other minorities from the workplace and politics by claiming those minorities were inferior, irrational, and incompetent (Gould, 1996). But any majority group—of any ethnicity, gender, or nationality—that discriminates against a minority will call upon prejudice to legitimize its actions (Islam & Hewstone, 1993).

Although it is widely believed that prejudice is the primary cause of conflict and war between groups, prejudice is actually more often a result of conflict and war; it legitimizes them. When any two groups are in direct competition for jobs, or when people are worried about their incomes and the stability of their communities, prejudice between them increases (Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991). Social psychologist Elliot Aronson (1999) traced the rise and fall of attitudes toward Chinese immigrants in North America in the nineteenth century, as reported in newspapers of the time (Aronson, 2004). When the Chinese were working in the gold mines and potentially taking jobs from white labourers, whites described them as depraved, vicious, and bloodthirsty. Just a decade later, when the Chinese began working on the transcontinental railroad—doing difficult and dangerous jobs that few white men wanted—prejudice against them declined. Whites described them as hardworking, industrious, and law-abiding. Then, after the railroad was finished and the Chinese had to compete for jobs during the Depression, white attitudes changed again. Whites now considered the Chinese to be “criminal,” “crafty,” “conniving,” and “stupid” (Aronson, 1999b). (The white newspapers did not report the attitudes of the Chinese.)

The ultimate competition between groups, of course, is war. When two nations are at war, prejudice against the enemy allows each side to continue feeling righteous about its cause. Each side portrays the other in stereotyped ways to demonize and dehumanize the enemy, making it seem that the enemy deserves to be killed (Keen, 1986).



Many stereotypes serve psychological and social functions. For instance, many people feel uncomfortable when thinking of groups that differ significantly from their own. How do you feel when looking at this picture of two men at their wedding?

Fomenting prejudice against the enemy—calling them vermin, rats, mad dogs, traitors, heathens, baby-killers, brutes, or monsters—legitimizes the attackers' motives for hate.

Review 8.1 summarizes the sources of prejudices and the many functions prejudices serve for those who hold them.

Review 8.1

Sources of Prejudice



Psychological

Low self-esteem

Anxiety

Insecurity

"Those people are not as moral and decent as we are."



Social

Conformity

Parental messages

Societal messages (ads, etc.)

"My parents taught me that those people are just no good."



Economic

Majority's desire to preserve its status

Competition for jobs, power, resources

"Those people aren't smart enough to do this work."



Cultural

Ethnocentrism

Desire for group identity

The justification of war

"We have to protect our religion/country/government from those people."

Defining and Measuring Prejudice

Prejudice is a weasel—hard to grasp and hold on to. One problem is that not all prejudiced people are prejudiced in the same way or to the same extent. Suppose that Raymond wishes to be tolerant and open-minded, but he grew up in a small homogeneous community and feels uncomfortable with members of other cultural and religious groups. Should we put Raymond in the same category as Rupert, an outspoken bigot who actively discriminates against others? Do good intentions count? What if Raymond knows nothing about Hindus and mindlessly blurts out a remark that

**THINKING CRITICALLY****Define Your Terms**

What does it mean to be “prejudiced”? Is it blatant hostility, vague discomfort with another group, a patronizing attitude of superiority, or ignorance about an unfamiliar culture?

reveals his ignorance? Is that prejudice or thoughtlessness? These questions complicate the measurement of prejudice.

Similar complexities occur in defining “sexism.” In research with 15 000 men and women in 19 nations, psychologists found that “hostile sexism,” which reflects active dislike of women, is different from “benevolent sexism,” in which superficially positive attitudes put women on a pedestal but nonetheless reinforce women’s subordination. The latter type of sexism is affectionate but patronizing, conveying the attitude that women are so wonderful, good, kind, and moral that they should stay at home, away from the rough and tumble (and power and income) of public life (Glick et al., 2000). In all 19 countries studied, men had significantly higher hostile sexism scores than women did, but in about half of the countries, women endorsed benevolent sexism as much as men did. The researchers believe that benevolent sexism is “a particularly insidious form of prejudice” because, lacking a tone of hostility to women, it doesn’t seem like a “prejudice” to men, and also because women “may find its sweet allure difficult to resist” (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Yet both forms of sexism—whether you think women are “too good” for equality or “not good enough”—legitimize gender discrimination and, in some cultures, wife abuse. Studies in Turkey and Brazil found that men who abuse their wives score high not only on hostile sexism, but also on benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2002).

Perhaps you are thinking: “Hey, what about men? There are plenty of prejudices against men, too—that they are sexual predators, emotionally heartless, domineering, and arrogant.” In fact, the same group of researchers recently completed a 16-nation study of attitudes toward men (Glick et al., 2004). They did find that many people hold prejudices toward men, namely that they are aggressive and predatory, and overall just not as warm and wonderful as women.

The good news is that on surveys in Canada, prejudice of all kinds has been dropping sharply. The numbers of people who *admit* to believing that nonwhites are inferior to whites, women are inferior to men, and gays are inferior to straights have plummeted in the last 20 years (Dovidio, 2001; Plant & Devine, 1998). Some psychologists, however, believe that this change simply reflects a growing awareness that it isn’t cool to admit prejudice, rather than a real decline in prejudiced feelings (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001). For instance, in studies of job hiring practices, most whites do not discriminate against visible minority candidates who have strong qualifications, but they are far more likely to choose *average* white candidates over *average* ones from visible minorities (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). This finding suggests that although old-fashioned discrimination (“All people of ‘X’ ethnicity are inferior”) may be gone, it lives on in a subtler form (“Well, people like Jarome Iginla or Chantal Petitclerc are the exception; most people like them are . . .”).

One reason that prejudice lives on, as Gordon Allport (1954/1979) observed years ago, is that “defeated intellectually, prejudice lingers emotionally.” People may lose their *explicit* prejudices toward a group but retain an *implicit*, unconscious prejudice (recall the distinction we drew earlier between explicit and implicit attitudes). Implicit attitudes and prejudices are assumed to be automatic and unintentional, and hence a truer measure of a person’s “real” feelings (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001). Researchers have developed four different ways to measure implicit prejudices:

1 **Measures of symbolic racism.** Some researchers believe that much prejudice lurks behind a mask of *symbolic racism*, in which individuals disguise their animosity toward nonconforming groups by claiming they are concerned only about social issues such as “reverse discrimination” or “hard-core criminals” (Bell, 1992; J. Jones, 1997). Instead of asking respondents about feelings of prejudice toward other groups in gen-

> Get Involved**Probing Your Prejudices**

Are you prejudiced toward a specific group of people? Is it a group defined by gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, physical appearance, or political views? Write down your deepest thoughts and feelings about this group. Take as long as you want, and do not censor yourself or say what you think you ought to say. Now reread what you have written. Which of the many reasons for prejudice discussed in the text might be supporting your views? Do you feel that your attitudes toward the group are legitimate, or are you uncomfortable about having them?

eral, researchers probe for hostile feelings that might lie beneath surface attitudes. The same people who will not admit to disliking indigenous peoples, for example, might agree that “Indigenous peoples are getting too demanding in their push for self-determination” (Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000). Thus, symbolic racism involves conservative values about the importance of succeeding on one’s own efforts, combined with negative feelings about nonconforming groups (Sears & Henry, 2003).

2 *Measures of behaviour rather than attitudes.* Some investigators observe how people unconsciously behave when they are with a possible object of prejudice. Some individuals sit farther away than they normally would; reveal involuntary, negative facial expressions; or show other signs of physical tension (Fazio et al., 1995; Guglielmi, 1999).

Another behavioural approach is to observe what allegedly unprejudiced people do when they are angered or stressed (J. Jones, 1991; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). In one experiment, students thought they were giving shock to other students in a study of biofeedback. Anglophones initially showed *less* aggression toward francophones than toward other anglophones. But as soon as the anglophone students became angry after overhearing derogatory remarks about themselves, they showed *more* aggression toward francophones than toward other anglophones (Meindl & Lerner, 1985). The same pattern appears in studies of how whites behave toward blacks (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1981), straights toward homosexuals, and non-Jewish students toward Jews (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

These findings imply that people are willing to control negative feelings toward targets of prejudice under normal conditions. But as soon as they are angry or frustrated, or get a jolt to their self-esteem, their real prejudice reveals itself.

3 *Measures of physiological changes in the brain.* In recent years, some social psychologists have joined forces with neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists to develop a new specialty called *social neuroscience* (sometimes called social-cognitive neuroscience). Using the technologies of neuroscience, these psychologists are studying which parts of the brain are involved in all kinds of social-psychological processes, including stereotypes and prejudice (Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Devine, 2003; Cacioppo et al., 2003). For example, when blacks and whites see pictures of each other, activity in the amygdala (the brain structure associated with fear and other negative emotions) is elevated. It is not elevated when people see pictures of members of their own group (Hart et al., 2000).

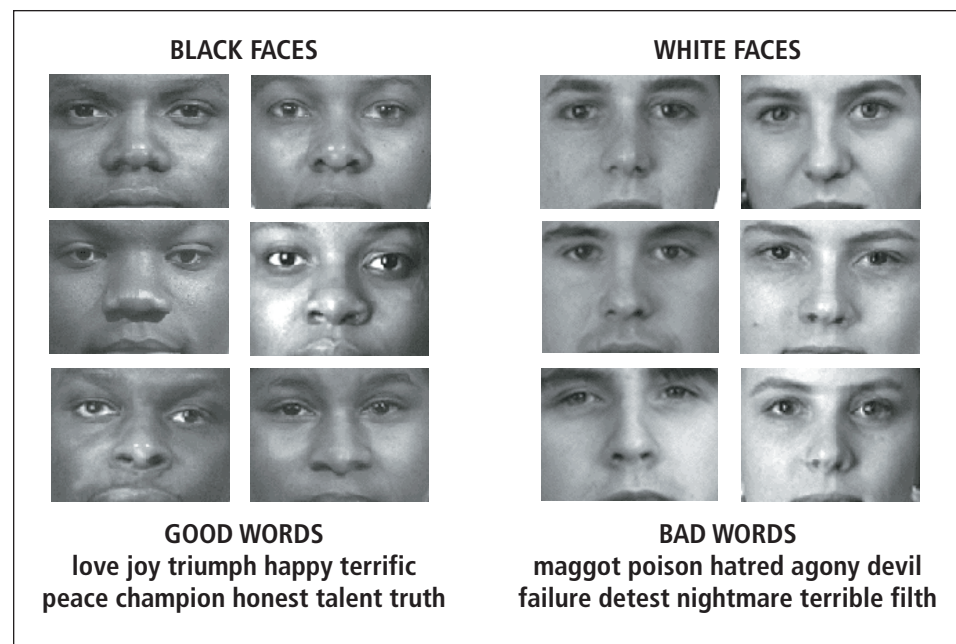
4 *Measures of unconscious associations with the target group.* A fourth, more controversial way of measuring prejudice is based on the assumption that people are often unaware of their own negative feelings about a target group—but their unconscious feelings give them away. This method taps people’s unconscious associations between a stimulus and its degree of pleasantness or unpleasantness (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001; Dovidio, 2001). Using this method, researchers have found that many people who describe themselves as unprejudiced nonetheless have unconscious negative associations with certain groups. For example, it takes white students longer to respond to associations between black faces and positive words (for example, *triumph*, *honest*) or to associations between white faces and negative words (for example, *devil*, *failure*), than it does for them to respond to black faces and negative words or white faces and positive words (see Figure 8.3).

This test has also been used to identify apparently unconscious prejudices against women, the elderly, people of different religions, and Asians (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). However, critics are concerned that this method does not reliably measure stable prejudices and has other methodological problems that warrant caution in interpreting it (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003).

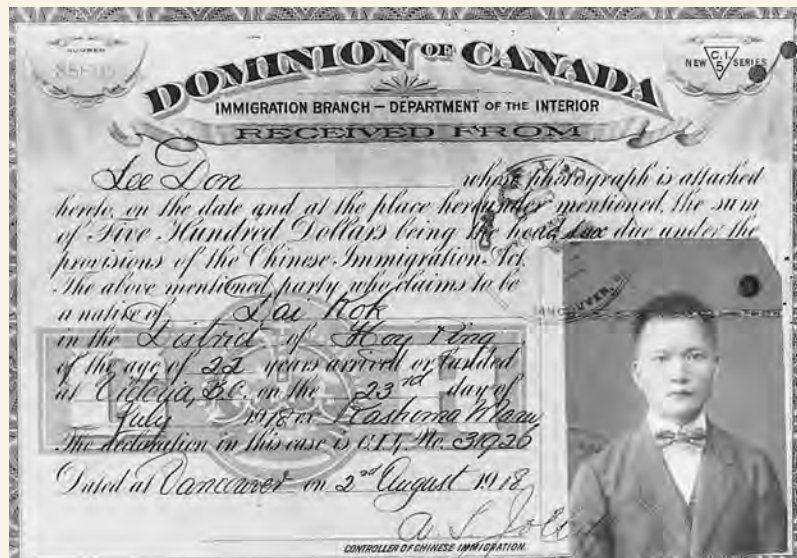
Figure 8.3

AN IMPLICIT MEASURE OF PREJUDICE

In a series of experiments, participants responded to black or white faces and to positive or negative words. They used separate computer keys to indicate whether each face was black or white, and the same keys to indicate whether each word was good or bad. But half of the time, "white + good" and "black + bad" were on the same keys, and the other half, "white + bad" and "black + good" were on the same keys. Participants took longer to respond in the white + bad condition than in the white + good condition, indicating that they had stronger unconscious associations between "white" and "good" (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001).

**The Many Targets of Prejudice**

Prejudice has a long history, everywhere in the world. Why do new prejudices keep emerging and why do some old ones persist?

**NOTICE TO ALL JAPANESE PERSONS AND PERSONS OF JAPANESE RACIAL ORIGIN**

TAKE NOTICE that under Orders Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24 of the British Columbia Security Commission, the following areas were made prohibited areas to all persons of the Japanese race:—

LULU ISLAND (including Steveston)	SAPPERTON
SEA ISLAND	BURQUITLAM
EBURNE	PORT MOODY
MARPOLE	IOCO
DISTRICT OF QUEENSBOROUGH	PORT COQUITLAM
CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER	MAILLARDVILLE
	FRASER MILLS

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that any person of the Japanese race found within any of the said prohibited areas without a written permit from the British Columbia Security Commission or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police shall be liable to the penalties provided under Order in Council P.C. 1665.

AUSTIN C. TAYLOR,
Chairman,
British Columbia Security Commission

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know exactly what these implicit measures are measuring: actual prejudice (animosity), unfamiliarity with the target stimulus, or activation of a stereotype? The brain automatically registers and encodes categories, including basic human categories of gender, race, and age (Ito & Urland, 2003). That's very interesting, and suggests a neurological underpinning to the cognitive efficiency of stereotyping, but does it indicate the existence of a *prejudice* or simply recognition of difference? As we saw earlier, people find familiar names, products, and even nonsense syllables to be more pleasant than unfamiliar ones. So are these tests measuring true prejudice toward a target or merely unfamiliarity with it? If a Japanese student and a Korean student sit farther away from one another than they would from a student of their own ethnicity, does this reveal prejudice, discomfort, unfamiliarity with the target, or, as we also saw earlier, different cultural norms for conversational distance?

As you can see, defining and measuring prejudice are not easy tasks. They involve distinguishing explicit attitudes from unconscious ones, active hostility from simple discomfort, what people say from what they feel, and what people feel from how they actually behave (Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000).

Reducing Conflict and Prejudice

The findings that emerge from the study of prejudice show us that efforts to reduce prejudice by appealing to moral or intellectual arguments are not enough. They must also touch people's deeper insecurities, fears, or negative associations with a group. Just



Canadians have a long history of persecuting those who were not white and anglophone, including the Japanese, Chinese, Ukrainians, Hutterites, francophones, and Southeast Asians. Indigenous peoples have been objects of hatred since Europeans first arrived on the continent (this is especially interesting, given our national commitment to multiculturalism). And anti-female prejudice continues.

as social psychologists investigate the situations that increase prejudice and animosity toward other groups—particularly, how war and economic conflict produce heightened stereotyping and ethnocentrism—they have also examined the conditions that might reduce them. Of course, given the many sources, kinds, and functions of prejudice, no one method will work in all situations. People who have psychological motives for hating another group (say, to bolster their own self-esteem, or to displace anger and fear) may change their explicit attitudes if forced to by social pressures, yet retain implicit prejudices. People who hold prejudices in order to justify their economic superiority over a poorer group are not going to give them up—at least, not until both sides have more equitable resources and more experience with each other (Plant & Devine, 1998; Rudman, 2004).

In spite of these complexities, in some situations prejudice and conflict between groups can be overcome. Social psychologists have identified four conditions that must be met for this to happen (Allport, 1954/1979; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Fisher, 1994; Pettigrew, 1998; Rubin, 1994; Slavin & Cooper, 1999; Staub, 1996; Stephan, 1999; Wittig & Grant-Thompson, 1998):

1 *Both sides must have equal legal status, economic opportunities, and power.* This requirement is the spur behind efforts to change laws that permit discrimination. Women never would have gotten the right to vote, attend university, or do “men’s work” without persistent challenges to the laws that permitted gender discrimination. Laws, however, do not necessarily change attitudes if all they do is produce unequal contact between groups or if competition for jobs continues.

2 *Authorities and community institutions must endorse egalitarian norms and thereby provide moral support and legitimacy for both sides.* Society must establish norms of equality and support them through the actions of officials—teachers, employers, the judicial system, government officials, and the police. Where segregation is official government policy, as apartheid was in South Africa, obviously conflict and prejudice will not only continue, they will seem “normal” and justified.

3 *Both sides must have opportunities to work and socialize together, formally and informally.* According to the *contact hypothesis*, prejudice declines when people have the chance to get used to one another’s rules, food, music, customs, and attitudes. By making friends with one another, people of different groups and cultures can discover their shared interests and shared humanity. Stereotypes are shattered once people realize that “those people” aren’t, in fact, “all alike” (Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 1999).

The contact hypothesis has been supported by many diverse studies in both the laboratory and the “real world”: studies of relationships between German and immigrant Turkish children in German schools; young people’s attitudes toward the elderly; healthy people’s attitudes toward the mentally ill; nondisabled children’s attitudes toward people with disabilities; and straight people’s prejudices toward gay men and lesbians (Fishbein, 1996; Herek, 1999; Herek & Capitano, 1996; Pettigrew, 1997). When people make friends with members of another group, they tend to become less prejudiced toward the group as a whole.

4 *Both sides must co-operate, working together for a common goal.* Co-operation often reduces us–them thinking and prejudice by creating an encompassing social identity—the Eagles and the Rattlers solution. Many successful co-operative situations have been established in schools, businesses, and communities, requiring formerly antagonistic groups to work together for a common goal.

For example, some elementary schools have experimented with the “jigsaw” method of building co-operation. Children from different ethnic groups work together



Here, volunteers from Habitat for Humanity, a group that constructs housing for low-income people, build a new home in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Individuals in such situations tend to do better, like their peers better, and become less stereotyped in their thinking than individuals in competitive situations (Aronson, 2000; Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

on a task that is broken up like a jigsaw puzzle; each child needs to co-operate with the others to put the assignment together. Children in such classes tend to do better, like their classmates better, and become less stereotyped in their thinking than children in competitive classrooms (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Slavin & Cooper, 1999). However, co-operation does not work when members of a group have unequal status, blame one another for loafing or “dropping the ball,” or believe that their teachers or employers are playing favourites.

Each of these four approaches to reducing prejudice is important, but none is sufficient on its own. Clearly, contact between two groups is not enough; at many multi-ethnic high schools, ethnic groups form cliques and gangs, fighting one another and defending their own ways. Likewise, co-operation in working for a common goal may not work when members of a group have unequal status or believe the teacher or employer is playing favourites. Perhaps one reason that group conflicts and prejudice are so persistent is that all four conditions are rarely met at the same time.

◉ < Research Focus

Gender Equity in Pay

You have probably heard somewhere that women who work full time generally earn less in wages than their male counterparts. Despite the efforts of women’s groups and the explosion of legislation requiring pay equity, recent research suggests women’s incomes are still approximately 28 percent lower than those of men (Desmarais & Curtis, 2001). Why this is the case has yet to be fully understood but research conducted by Serge Desmarais, a social psychologist at the University of Guelph, suggests that men and women often differ not only in the actual pay that they receive, but also in their beliefs about the amount of pay they should receive for their work. Desmarais found that when students are allowed to pay themselves for tasks they complete as part of psychology experiments, women participants actually pay themselves less than the men do (Desmarais & Curtis, 1997a).

Many researchers suggest that this difference exists due to gender socialization. That is, some suggest that women are taught to be more communal than men, and thus focus less on themselves and more on the group. Conversely, men are socialized to be more individualist, and thus focus more on themselves and less on the group, instead seeking personal mastery of tasks. However, research performed by Desmarais suggests

that early experiences with pay, itself, also play a role in why the sexes feel they are entitled to different amounts of pay for the work they do. For example, research has found that women who had earned less money than men in their past jobs were the ones who also reported feeling that they deserved less money than men. Moreover, this result was true not only for jobs that they had already held, but also for jobs they expected to hold in the future (Desmarais & Curtis, 1997b).

Interestingly, this difference disappeared when the researchers compared the pay entitlement expectations of male and female students who had had similar incomes in the past. When they compared males and females who had received similar rates of pay in the past and reminded them about their past income and work experience before allowing them to pay themselves, both males and females paid themselves equally (Desmarais & Curtis, 1997a). Although men and women can differ in their expectations of pay, it appears that this difference may reflect past experiences and individual perceptions of these experiences. Thus, when you are negotiating a salary for a job, be sure to ask what the last candidate was paid, and what others in similar jobs are paid, *before* you sign on the dotted line!

D. S. & L. E.

Quick Quiz

Try to overcome your prejudice against quizzes by taking this one.

A. Which concept—ethnocentrism, stereotyping, or prejudice—is illustrated by each of the following statements?

1. Guy believes that all Anglos are uptight and cold, and he won't listen to any evidence that contradicts his belief.
2. John knows and likes the Sikh minority in his town, but he privately believes that English culture is superior.

3. Jane believes that Honda owners are thrifty and practical. June believes that Honda owners are stingy and dull.

B. What are four important conditions required for reducing prejudice and conflict between groups?



C. Surveys find that large percentages of indigenous peoples, Asians, and Southeast Asians hold negative stereotypes of one another and resent other minorities almost as much as they resent whites. What are some reasons that people who have themselves been victims of stereotyping and prejudice would hold the same attitudes toward others?

Answers: A. 1. prejudice 2. ethnocentrism 3. stereotypes B. Both sides must have equal status and power; have the moral and legal support of authorities and society at large; have opportunities to socialize, formally and informally, and co-operate for a common goal. C. ethnocentrism; low self-esteem; conformity with relatives and friends who share these prejudices; parental lessons and messages conveyed by the media; and economic competition

WHAT'S AHEAD

- Are “age-old tribal hatreds” the best explanation for war and genocide?
- What is the “banality of evil,” and what does it tell us about human nature?

The Question of Human Nature



THINKING CRITICALLY

Don't Oversimplify

Many people like to divide individuals and nations into those that are “good” and those that are “evil.” What is wrong with thinking this way?

Throughout this chapter we have seen that “human nature” contains the potential for unspeakable acts of cruelty and inspiring acts of goodness. It's easy to believe that some cultures and individuals are just inherently good or evil. But from the standpoint of social and cultural psychology, all human beings, like all cultures, contain the potential for both. People everywhere love their families and are loyal to their friends and country, and yet virtually no country or group has bloodless hands. The Nazis systematically exter-

minated millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, people with disabilities, and anyone else not of the “pure” Aryan “race.” Canadians slaughtered indigenous peoples in North America, the Spanish conquistadors slaughtered native peoples in Mexico and South America, Iraqis slaughtered Kurds, and the Hutu in Rwanda murdered thousands of Tutsi.

Many people believe that these outbreaks of horrifying violence are a result of inner aggressive drives, the sheer evilness of the enemy, or “age-old tribal hatreds.” But in the social-psychological view, they result from the all-too-normal processes we have discussed in this chapter, including ethnocentrism, obedience to authority, conformity, deindividuation, stereotyping, and prejudice. These processes are especially likely to be activated when a government feels weakened and vulnerable. By generating an outside enemy, rulers create “us–them” thinking to impose order and cohesion among their citizens and to create a scapegoat for the country’s economic problems (Smith, 1998; Staub, 1996). However, throughout history, as circumstances have changed within a culture, societies have shifted from being warlike to being peaceful, and vice versa.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1963), who covered the trial of Adolf Eichmann, used the phrase *the banality of evil* to describe how it was possible for Eichmann and other “normal” people in Nazi Germany to commit the monstrous acts they did. (*Banal* means “commonplace” or “unoriginal.”) The compelling evidence for the banality of evil is, perhaps, the hardest lesson in psychology. Of course, some people do stand out as being unusually heroic or unusually sadistic. But as we have seen, good people can do terribly disturbing things when norms and roles encourage or require them to do so—when the situation takes over and they do not stop to think critically. Otherwise healthy people may join self-destructive cults, harm others if ordered to, and go along with a violent crowd.

The research discussed in this chapter suggests that ethnocentrism and prejudice will always be with us, as long as differences exist among groups. But it can also help us formulate ways of living in a diverse world. By identifying the conditions that create the banality of evil, perhaps we can create others that foster the “banality of virtue”—everyday acts of kindness, selflessness, and generosity.

Taking Psychology with You

Travels across the Cultural Divide

A French salesman worked for a company that was bought by a North American firm. When the new manager ordered him to step up his sales within the next three months, the employee quit in a huff, taking his customers with him. Why? In France, it takes years to develop customers; in family-owned businesses, relationships with customers may span generations. The new owners wanted instant results, as North Americans often do, but the French salesman knew this was impossible. The North American

view was, “He wasn’t up to the job; he’s lazy and disloyal, so he stole my customers.” The French view was, “There is no point in explaining anything to a person who is so stupid as to think you can acquire loyal customers in three months” (Hall & Hall, 1987).

Both men were committing the fundamental attribution error: assuming the other person’s behaviour was due to personality rather than the situation—in this case, a situation governed by cultural rules. Many corporations now realize

that such rules are not trivial and that success in a global economy depends on understanding them. You, too, can benefit from the psychological research on culture, whether you plan to do business abroad, visit as a tourist, or just get along better in your own society.

- **Be sure you understand the other culture’s rules, manners, and customs.** If you find yourself getting angry over something a person from another culture is doing, try to find out whether

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your expectations and perceptions of that person's behaviour are appropriate. For example, Koreans typically do not shake hands when greeting strangers, whereas most North Americans and Europeans do. People who shake hands as a gesture of friendship and courtesy are likely to feel insulted if another person refuses to do the same, unless they understand this cultural difference.

Or suppose you are shopping in the Middle East or Latin America, where bargaining on a price is the usual practice. If you are not used to bargaining, the experience is likely to be exasperating—you will not know whether you got taken or got a great deal. On the other hand, if you are from a bargaining culture, you will feel just as exasperated if a seller offers you a flat price. “Where’s the fun in this?” you’ll say. “The whole human transaction of shopping is gone!”

Whichever kind of culture you come from, you may need a “translator” to help you navigate the unfamiliar system. For example, a dentist we know could not persuade his Iranian patients that office fees are fixed, not negotiable. They kept offering him half, then 60 percent . . . and each time he said “no” they thought he was just taking a hard negotiating position. It took a bicultural relative of the patients to explain the odd Canadian custom of fixed prices for dental services.

■ ***When in Rome, do as the Romans do—as much as possible.***

Most of the things you really need to know about a culture are not to be found in the guidebooks or travelogues. To learn the unspoken rules of a culture, look, listen, and observe. What is the pace of life like? Do people regard brash individuality as admirable or embarrassing? When customers enter a shop, do they greet and chat with the shopkeeper or ignore the person as they browse?

Remember, though, that even when you know the rules, you may find it difficult to carry them out, as we noted in discussing conversational distance. For example, cultures differ in their tolerance for prolonged gazes (Keating, 1994). In the Middle East, two men will look directly at one another as they talk, but such direct gazes would be deeply uncomfortable to most Japanese and many indigenous peoples. Knowing this fact about gaze rules can help people accept the reality of different customs, but most of us will still feel uncomfortable trying to change our own ways.

■ ***Avoid stereotyping.***

Try not to let your awareness of cultural differences cause you to overlook individual variations within cultures. During a dreary winter, social psychologist Roger Brown (1986) went to the Bahamas for a vacation. To his surprise, he found the people

he met unfriendly, rude, and sullen. He decided the reason was that Bahamians had to deal with spoiled, demanding foreigners, and he tried out this hypothesis on a cab driver. The cab driver looked at Brown in amazement, smiled cheerfully, and told him that Bahamians don't mind tourists—just *unsmiling* tourists.

And then Brown realized what had been going on. “Not tourists generally, but this tourist, myself, was the cause,” he wrote. “Confronted with my unrelaxed wintry face, they had assumed I had no interest in them and had responded noncommittally, inexpressively. I had created the Bahamian national character. Everywhere I took my face it sprang into being. So I began smiling a lot, and the Bahamians changed their national character. In fact, they lost any national character and differentiated into individuals.”

Wise travellers can use their knowledge of cultural differences to expand their understanding of human behaviour, while avoiding the trap of stereotyping. Sociocultural research teaches us to appreciate the countless explicit and implicit cultural rules that govern our behaviour, values, and attitudes, and those of others. Yet we should not forget Roger Brown's lesson that every human being is an individual: one who not only reflects a culture, but also shares the common concerns of all humanity.

Summary

Roles and Rules

- Social psychology is the study of people in social context, including the influence of *norms*, *roles*, and groups on behaviour and cognition. Roles and norms are affected by one's *culture*.
- Two classic studies illustrate the power of roles to affect individual actions. In Milgram's obedience study, most participants in the role of "teacher" inflicted what they thought was extreme shock on another person because of the experimenter's authority. In Zimbardo's prison study, university students quickly fell into the role of "prisoner" or "guard."
- Obedience to authority contributes to the smooth running of society, but obedience can also lead to actions that are deadly, foolish, or illegal. People obey orders because they can be punished if they do not, out of respect for authority, and to gain advantages. Even when they would rather not obey, they may do so because they hand over responsibility for their actions to the authority; because the role is *routinized* into duties that are performed mindlessly; because they are embarrassed to break the rules of good manners and lack the words to protest; or because they have become *entrapped*.

Social Influences on Beliefs

- According to *attribution theory*, people are motivated to search for causes to which they can attribute their own and other people's behaviour. Their attributions may be *situational* or *dispositional*. The *fundamental attribution error* occurs when people overestimate personality traits as a cause of behaviour and underestimate the influence of the situation. A *self-serving bias* allows people to excuse their mistakes by blaming the situation, yet take credit for their good deeds. According to the *just-world hypothesis*, most people need to believe that the world is fair and that people get what they deserve. To preserve this belief, they may

blame victims of abuse or injustice for provoking or deserving it, instead of blaming the perpetrators.

- People hold many *attitudes* about people, things, and ideas. Attitudes may be *explicit* (conscious) or *implicit* (unconscious); some are fairly ingrained aspects of personality, and others result from social influences and are more changeable. One important external influence on attitudes is the shared experiences of a person's age group, which create a *generational identity*. Some attitudes change through experience; others change because of a psychological need for consistency (the discomfort of being in a state of *cognitive dissonance*).
- One powerful way to influence attitudes is through the *validity effect*: Simply repeating a statement over and over makes it seem more believable. Techniques of attitude change include associating a product or message with someone who is famous, attractive, or expert, and linking the product with good feelings. Fear tactics tend to backfire.
- Some methods of attitude change are intentionally manipulative. Tactics of *coercive persuasion* include putting a person in extreme distress; defining problems simplistically; offering the appearance of unconditional love and acceptance in exchange for unquestioning loyalty; creating a new identity for the person; using entrapment; and controlling access to outside information.

Individuals in Groups

- In groups, individuals often behave differently than they would on their own. Conformity has many benefits for the smooth running of society and allows people to feel in harmony with others like them. As the famous Asch experiment showed, most people will conform to the judgments of others even when the others are plain wrong. People in *collectivist* cultures value conformity and the sense of group harmony it creates more than do

people in *individualist* cultures. But everyone conforms under some conditions.

- Most people conform to social pressure because they identify with a group, trust the group's judgment or knowledge, hope for personal gain, or wish to be liked. But they also may conform mindlessly and self-destructively, violating their own preferences and values because "everyone else is doing it."
- *Diffusion of responsibility* in a group can lead to inaction on the part of individuals, such as *bystander apathy* or, in work groups, *social loafing*. The diffusion of responsibility is especially likely to occur under conditions that promote *deindividuation*, the loss of awareness of one's individuality. Deindividuation increases when people feel anonymous, as in a large group or crowd, or when they are wearing masks or uniforms. In some situations, crowd norms lead deindividuated people to behave aggressively, but in others, crowd norms foster helpfulness and altruism.
- The willingness to speak up for an unpopular opinion, blow the whistle on illegal or immoral practices, help a stranger in trouble, or perform other acts of *altruism* is partly a matter of personal belief and conscience. But several social and situational factors are also important: The person perceives that help is needed; the situation increases the likelihood that the person will take responsibility; the person decides that the costs of not doing anything are greater than the costs of getting involved; the person has an ally; and the person becomes entrapped in a commitment to help or dissent.

Us versus Them: Group Identity and Conflict

- People develop *social identities* based on their group affiliations, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other social memberships. Social identities provide a feeling of place and connection to the world.

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- In culturally diverse societies, many people face the problem of balancing their *ethnic identity* with *acculturation* into the larger society. Depending on whether ethnic identity and acculturation are strong or weak, a person may become *bicultural*, choose *assimilation*, become an *ethnic separatist*, or feel *marginal*.
- *Ethnocentrism*, the belief that one's own group or nation is superior to all others, promotes "us–them" thinking. People develop *social identities* based on their group affiliations, including nationality, ethnicity, religion, and other social memberships. As soon as people see themselves as "us" (members of an in-group), they tend to define anyone different as "them." Dividing the world into us and them is often fuelled by competition. Conflict and hostility between groups can be reduced by teamwork and by *interdependence* in working for mutual goals.
- *Stereotypes* help people rapidly process new information, organize experience, and predict how others will behave. But they distort reality by (1) emphasizing differences between groups, (2) underestimating the differences within groups, and (3) producing selective perception.

Group Conflict and Prejudice

- A *prejudice* is an unreasonable negative feeling toward a category of people. Prejudice has psychological, social-cultural, and economic functions. It wards off feelings of anxiety and doubt; provides a simple explanation of complex problems; and bolsters self-esteem when a person feels threatened. Prejudice also allows people to feel closer to their families, social groups, and culture. But the most important function of prejudice is to justify a majority group's economic interests and dominance, or, in extreme cases, to legitimize war. During times of economic insecurity and competition for jobs, prejudice rises significantly.
- Prejudice is complex to define and measure. For example, "hostile sexism" is different from "benevolent sexism," yet both legitimize gender discrimination. People often disagree on whether racism and other prejudices are declining or have merely taken new forms. Because many people are unwilling to admit their prejudices openly, some researchers measure *symbolic racism* (prejudice disguised in opinions about race-related social issues);

people's actual behaviour toward a target group when they are stressed, provoked, or insulted; or nonconscious, *implicit* prejudice as revealed in emotional associations to a target group.

- Reducing prejudice and conflict between groups requires four conditions: both sides must have equal legal status, economic standing, and power; both sides must have the legal and moral support of authorities and the larger culture; both sides must have opportunities to work and socialize together (the *contact hypothesis*); and both sides must work together for a common goal.

The Question of Human Nature

- Although many people believe that only bad individuals commit bad deeds, the principles of social and cultural psychology show that under certain conditions, good people are often induced to do bad things, too. All individuals are affected by the rules and norms of their cultures; and by the social processes of obedience and conformity, bystander apathy, deindividuation, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice.

Key Terms

acculturation 286
 altruism 283
 attitude 274
 attribution theory 271
 bicultural, assimilated, ethnic separatist, and marginal identities 286
 blaming the victim 273
 bystander apathy 281
 coercive persuasion 277
 cognitive dissonance 275
 collectivist cultures 280
 contact hypothesis 296
 conversational distance 265
 cultural psychology 263

culture 265
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 routinization 269
 self-serving bias 272
 situational attributions 271
 social cognition 271
 social identity 286
 social loafing 281
 social neuroscience 293
 social psychology 263
 stereotype 288
 symbolic racism 292
 validity effect 276

Looking Back

- How do social rules regulate behaviour—and what is likely to happen when you violate them? (p. 264)
- Do you have to be mean or disturbed to inflict pain on someone just because an authority tells you to? (pp. 265–267)
- How can ordinary university students be transformed into sadistic prison guards? (pp. 267–268)
- How can people be “entrapped” into violating their moral principles? (p. 270)
- What is one of the most common mistakes people make when they explain the behaviour of others? (pp. 271–272)
- Why would a person blame victims of rape or torture for having brought their misfortunes on themselves? (p. 273)
- What is the “Big Lie,” and why does it work so well? (p. 276)
- What is the difference between ordinary techniques of persuasion and the coercive techniques used by cults? (p. 277)
- Why do people in groups often go along with the majority even when the majority is dead wrong? (pp. 279–281)
- In an emergency, are you more likely to get help when there are many strangers in the area or only a few? (p. 281)
- What enables some people to be nonconformists, help others at risk to themselves, or blow the whistle on wrongdoers? (pp. 284–285)
- In what different ways do people balance their ethnic identity and their membership in the larger culture? (p. 286)
- What is an effective antidote for “us–them” thinking? (pp. 287–288)
- How do stereotypes benefit us, and how do they distort reality? (p. 288)
- Is prejudice more likely to be a cause of war or a result of it? (pp. 289–291)
- If you believe that women are naturally better than men, are you “sexist”? (p. 292)
- Can you be unconsciously prejudiced even though you think you aren’t? (pp. 292–293)
- Why isn’t mere contact between cultural groups enough to reduce prejudice between them? What does work? (p. 296)
- Are “age-old tribal hatreds” the best explanation for war and genocide? (pp. 298–299)
- What is the “banality of evil,” and what does it tell us about human nature? (pp. 298–299)