Social Psychology

- Focuses on behavior and mental processes of the individual in context of other people
- Outline for next four classes:
  - First impressions
  - Attributions and attitudes
    - Obedience to authority
    - The Stanford Prison Experiment

Attributions

- Causal attribution:
  - An inference about what caused someone's behavior
  - Two main causes: Disposition and situation

Attributions

- Dispositional attribution:
  - Appeals to factors internal to the person
  - Traits, attitudes, preferences
- Situational attribution:
  - Appeals to circumstances and situations

Attribution errors

- Fundamental attribution error (person bias):
  - The tendency to attribute behavior to disposition while underestimating situational influences
  - Where others are concerned

Example: Quiz show

- Participants were randomly assigned to be Questioners, Contestants, or Observers
  - Random assignment was made very salient
Example: Quiz show (L. Ross et al., 1977)

- Questioners were asked to write tough general knowledge questions
  - E.g., What is the longest glacier in the world?
  - And then pose them to the Contestant
  - Give the answer when Contestant couldn’t
  - Observers watched the whole thing

Knowledge ratings

- Afterwards, Observers rated Questioner’s and Contestant’s general knowledge
  - Relative to the “average student”
  - Question: Would the ratings accurately reflect random assignment?
  - Person bias suggests not

Results

Observers thought the Questioner knew more than the Contestant
Discounting the role of random assignment in this situation

Attitudes

- Attitude:
  - A fairly stable evaluation of something as good or bad that influences our thoughts and behaviors
- Explicit measures:
  - Ask people direct questions about their attitude
  - Answers might be biased
- Implicit measures:
  - Test attitudes indirectly

Implicit Association Test (IAT)

- Reveals common attitudes
  - E.g., people generally associate female with nonviolent and male with violent
- Shows that attitudes can influence behavior
  - In the IAT, behavior is response time
  - Attitudes can influence behavior in much more profound ways
**Attitudes**

- Can behavior influence attitudes?
- Cognitive dissonance:  
  - An uncomfortable inconsistency between one’s attitudes and one’s actions
- Dissonance reduction:  
  - Reduce the discomfort by making attitudes and actions more consistent  
  - Attitudes might be easier to change than actions

**Dissonance reduction**  
(Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959)

- Participants were assigned boring tasks
- Then asked to tell some else that the tasks were enjoyable  
  - Pressured a little, if necessary  
  - Paid either $1 or $20
- Then asked to rate the tasks  
  - $1 participants rated the task more enjoyable than the $20 participants did

**Explanation**

- $1 was insufficient justification for lying  
  - $20 was a better justification  
  - Insufficient justification caused the dissonance
- How could $1 participants reduce the dissonance?  
  - They couldn’t change the action (lying)  
  - They could change their attitude toward the task  
    - If the task was fun, then they weren’t lying

**Other examples**

- Hazing rituals and initiation rites  
  - Bad action: Allowing oneself to be mistreated  
  - Attitude change: It was worth it
- Drinking and driving  
  - Bad action: Driving drunk  
  - Attitude change: Driving drunk isn’t that dangerous

**Effects of stereotypes**

- A stereotype is a kind of attitude
- Stereotypes can affect behavior toward those who are stereotyped
- What about the behavior of the people who are stereotyped?

**Effects of stereotypes**

- Stereotype threat:  
  - When behavior changes negatively to conform to an activated stereotype
- Stereotype lift:  
  - When behavior changes positively to conform to an activated stereotype
Stereotype threat and lift

[Ambady et al, 2001]

- Participants: 81 Asian-American girls
  - Grouped by grade: Lower Elementary (K-2), Upper Elementary (3-5), Middle School (6-8)
  - Recruited from Chinese, Korean, Japanese communities in a US city
- Did a manipulation task:
  - K - 2 colored in a line drawing
  - 3 - 8 answered questions on a survey
- Then took an age-appropriate math test

Conditions

- Asian identity:
  - Picture: Asian kids eating with bowl and chopsticks
  - Survey: ethnicity of classmates and friends? language spoken at home? etc.
- Gender identity:
  - Picture: Girl holding doll
  - Survey: friends boys or girls? which are better at sports? which parent do you identify with?

Conditions

- Control: Landscape, the weather
- Experimenter was blind to the stimulus

Results

- Stereotypes affected performance
  - Positively and negatively
  - Another example: "Obama effect" among African Americans in 2008 (Karp, Ko, & Friedman, 2009)
- But, findings in the “social priming” literature don’t always replicate
  - Questions about internal validity, publication bias