Social Psychology

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

Causal attribution

- An inference about what caused someone's behavior
- Dispositional attribution:
  - Appeals to factors internal to the person
    • Traits, attitudes, preferences
  - Situational attribution:
    - Appeals to circumstances and situations

The fundamental attribution error

- Overestimating the role of disposition relative to the role of situation
  - Where others are concerned
- Also known as person bias

Example: Quiz show

- Participants were randomly assigned to be Questioners, Contestants, or Observers
  - Random assignment was made salient

Example: Quiz show

- Questioners were asked to write “challenging but not impossible” general knowledge questions
  - E.g., What is the longest glacier in the world?
  - Pose them to the Contestant
  - Give the answer when Contestant couldn’t
    • Contestants got about 4 out of 10 correct
  - Observers watched the whole interaction
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 can affect behavior

- **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 affect behavior
  - Behavior, here, is response time
  - Other effects are more profound

Behavior can affect attitudes

- **Cognitive dissonance:**
  - An uncomfortable inconsistency between one’s behavior and one’s attitudes

- **Dissonance reduction:**
  - Reduce the discomfort by making behavior and attitudes more consistent
  - Attitudes might be easier to change than behavior
Dissonance reduction (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959)

- Participant was assigned two boring tasks
- Then was asked to lie to a peer
  - To say the tasks were fun
  - Paid either $1 or $20 (about $9 or $175 today)
- Then rated whether the tasks were fun
  - $1 participants rated the task more fun than the $20 participants did

Explanation

- Behavior: Lying to a peer
- Hypothetical mental processes, afterward:
  - $20 participant: I lied, but the money was good
  - $1 participant: I lied, for no good reason
    - Insufficient justification generates dissonance
- Attitude change that reduces dissonance:
  - I didn’t lie: The task was fun!
  - Sensemaking is a powerful and implicit process

Other examples

- Cruelty and bullying
  - Behavior: Treating someone badly
  - Attitude afterward: They deserved it
    - Otherwise, I was unfair
    - An example of blaming the victim
- Hazing rituals and initiation rites
  - Behavior: Accepting mistreatment
  - Attitude afterward: Admission is worth it
    - Otherwise, I accepted mistreatment for nothing

Other examples

- Decision making
  - Behavior: Choosing X over Y
  - Attitude afterward: Liking X even more
    - Otherwise, I might have made the wrong choice
  - Helps explain brand loyalty

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
- Caution advised
  - Findings in the “social priming” literature don’t always replicate
  - Publication bias: Researchers publish a study only if they get the effect they want
    - An effect can happen by chance, because of variability