Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think, feel, and behave in social situations. Social cognition refers to the mental processes people use to make sense out of their social environment. Social influence is the effect of situational factors and other people on an individual’s behavior.

II. Person Perception: Forming Impressions of Other People
A. Person perception refers to the mental processes we use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics and motives of others.

1. Person perception is an active and subjective process that always occurs in some interpersonal context. Every interpersonal context has three key components:
   a. the characteristics of the individual you are attempting to size up
   b. your own characteristics as the perceiver
   c. the specific situation in which the process occurs

2. Person perception follows some basic principles.
   a. Principle 1. Your reactions to others are determined by your perceptions of them, not by who or what they really are.
   b. Principle 2. Your goals in a particular situation determine the amount and kind of information you collect about others.
   c. Principle 3. In every situation, you evaluate people partly in terms of how you expect them to act in the situation. Social norms are the “rules,” or expectations, for appropriate behavior in a particular social situation.
   d. Principle 4. Your self-perception also influences how you perceive others and how you act on your perceptions.

B. Social Categorization: Using Mental Shortcuts in Person Perception
1. Social categorization is the mental process of categorizing people into groups (or social categories) on the basis of their shared characteristics. Much of it is automatic and spontaneous, and it often occurs outside conscious awareness.

2. Using social categories is cognitively efficient and naturally adaptive but may lead to inaccurate conclusions. It ignores a person’s unique qualities.

C. Implicit Personality Theories: He’s Not That Kind of Person!
1. An implicit personality theory is a network of assumptions or beliefs about the relationships among various types of people, traits, and behaviors. Through previous social experience, we form schemas about the traits and behaviors associated with different “types” of people.

2. Physical attractiveness plays a particularly influential role in person perception. From childhood, people are bombarded with the message “what is beautiful is good.” Most people associate physical attractiveness with a wide range of desirable characteristics.

3. Researchers have found very few personality differences between
beautiful people and their plainer counterparts.

a. Overall, attractive people tend to be less lonely, more popular, and less anxious in social situations.

b. Physical attractiveness is not correlated with intelligence, mental health, or self-esteem.

4. Focus on Neuroscience: Brain Reward When Making Eye Contact with Attractive People

a. Results of an fMRI study show that when we make direct eye contact with a physically attractive person, a brain area called the ventral striatum is activated; when an attractive person’s eye gaze is shifted away from the viewer, activity in the ventral striatum decreases.

b. The ventral striatum is a brain area that predicts reward: Neural activity increases when an unexpected reward suddenly appears and decreases when an expected reward fails to appear.

c. This is the first study to show that the brain’s ventral striatum processes rewards in the context of human social interaction.

5. Implicit personality theories, like social categories, can be useful as mental shortcuts in perceiving other people, but they are not always accurate.

III. Attribution: Explaining Behavior

Attribution is the mental process of inferring the causes of people’s behavior, including one’s own; it is also used to refer to the explanation made for a particular behavior.

A. The fundamental attribution error is the tendency to attribute the behavior of others to internal, personal characteristics, while ignoring or underestimating the effects of external, situational factors. It is common in individualistic cultures.

1. The fundamental attribution error plays a role in a common explanatory pattern called blaming the victim—the tendency to blame an innocent victim of misfortune for having somehow caused the problem or for not having taken steps to avoid or prevent it.

2. A second bias is the just-world hypothesis—the assumption that the world is fair and that therefore people get what they deserve and deserve what they get.

B. The Actor–Observer Discrepancy: You’re a Klutz but I Slipped on Some Ice!

1. The actor–observer discrepancy is the tendency to attribute one’s own behavior to external, situational causes, while attributing the behavior of others to internal, personal causes, especially when the behavior leads to negative outcomes.

2. We are less susceptible to the actor–observer discrepancy with friends and relatives.

3. One possible explanation is that we have more information about the potential causes of our own behavior (and that of our friends and relatives) than we do about the causes of other people’s behavior.
C. The Self-Serving Bias: Using Explanations That Meet Our Needs

1. The self-serving bias is the tendency to attribute successful outcomes of one’s own behavior to internal causes and unsuccessful outcomes to external, situational causes.

2. Culture and Human Behavior: Explaining Failure and Murder:
   Culture and Attributional Biases
   a. People from collectivistic cultures often demonstrate a bias opposite of the self-serving bias. The self-effacing bias, or modesty bias, involves blaming failure on internal, personal factors, while attributing success to external, situational factors.
   b. Members of collectivistic cultures are less likely to commit the fundamental attribution error than are members of individualistic cultures; that is, collectivists are more likely to attribute the causes of another person’s behavior to external, situational factors rather than to internal, personal factors.

IV. The Social Psychology of Attitudes

An attitude is a learned tendency to evaluate some object, person, or issue in a particular way. Such evaluations may be positive, negative, or ambivalent. Attitudes can include three components: a cognitive component, an emotional or affective component, and a behavioral component.

A. The Effect of Attitudes on Behavior

Research indicates that you’re most likely to behave in accordance with your attitudes when

1. Attitudes are extreme or are frequently expressed.
2. Attitudes have been formed through direct experience.
3. You are very knowledgeable about the subject.
4. You have a vested interest in the subject.
5. You anticipate a favorable outcome or response from others for doing so.

B. The Effect of Behavior on Attitudes: Fried Grasshoppers for Lunch?!

1. Cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of psychological tension (dissonance) that occurs when there’s an inconsistency between two thoughts or perceptions (cognitions). It typically results from the awareness that attitudes and behavior are in conflict. Experiments by Philip Zimbardo and colleagues underscore the power of cognitive dissonance.
2. Cognitive dissonance can change an attitude or the strength of an attitude so that it is consistent with some behavior that has already been performed.

V. Understanding Prejudice

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward people who belong to a specific social group. It is ultimately based on the exaggerated notion that members of other social groups are very different from members of our own social group. Keep two well-established points in mind.

1. Racial and ethnic groups are far more alike than they are different.
2. Any differences that may exist between members of different racial
and ethnic groups are far smaller than differences among various members of the same group.

A. From Stereotypes to Prejudice: In-Groups and Out-Groups

1. A stereotype is a cluster of characteristics that are associated with all members of a specific social group, often including qualities that are unrelated to the objective criteria that define the group.

2. Relying on stereotypes is problematic for several reasons:
   a. Attributing a stereotypic cause for an outcome or event can blind us to the true cause.
   b. An insidious effect of stereotypes is stereotype threat, in which a person performs in accordance with his or her group’s stereotype.
   c. Once formed, stereotypes are hard to shake.
   d. When confronted by evidence that contradicts a stereotype, people tend to discount that information.
   e. Creating special cases (exceptions) allows people to maintain stereotypes in the face of contradictory evidence.

3. People have a strong tendency to perceive others in terms of two basic social categories: “us” and “them.”
   a. The in-group (“us”) refers to the group to which we belong.
   b. The out-group (“them”) refers to groups of which we are not a member.

4. Two important patterns characterize our views of in-groups versus out-groups.
   a. Typically, we describe the members of our in-group as being quite varied, despite having enough features in common to belong to the same group.
   b. We tend to see members of the out-group as much more similar to one another, even in areas that have little to do with the criteria for group membership. This tendency is called the out-group homogeneity effect.

5. In-group bias is the tendency to judge the behavior of in-group members favorably and out-group members unfavorably. One form of in-group bias, called ethnocentrism, is the belief that one’s own culture or ethnic group is superior to others.

6. In combination, stereotypes and in-group/out-group bias form the cognitive basis for prejudicial attitudes.

7. Prejudice also has a strong emotional component, which is intensely negative and involves hatred, contempt, fear, and loathing.

   Behaviorally, prejudice can be displayed in the form of discrimination.
   a. One theory holds that intergroup hostility and prejudice may increase when there is competition for scarce resources.
   b. Prejudice and intergroup hostility are also likely to increase during times of social change.
   c. In the absence of conflict, prejudice is often directed against groups perceived as threatening important group norms and values.
B. Overcoming Prejudice

1. The Robbers Cave Experiment, conducted by Muzafar Sherif and his colleagues, helped clarify the conditions that produce intergroup conflict and harmony.

   a. Boys who came to camp were randomly assigned to two groups. After a week of separation, they met in a series of competitive games. A fierce rivalry quickly developed.
   b. To restore harmony, Sherif created a series of situations in which the two groups would need to cooperate to achieve a common goal.
   c. After a series of joint efforts, the rivalry diminished and the groups became friends.
   d. Sherif demonstrated how hostility between groups could be created and, more important, how that hostility could be overcome. However, some researchers questioned the applicability of these results to other intergroup situations in which there were intrinsic differences between the groups.

2. The Jigsaw Classroom: Promoting Cooperation

Social psychologist Elliot Aronson adapted Sherif’s results to a newly integrated elementary school.

   a. When mere contact between black and white children did not dissipate tension and prejudice, Aronson reasoned that the competitive schoolroom atmosphere might be partly at fault.
   b. Aronson and his colleagues developed a cooperative technique called the jigsaw classroom technique, which brought students together in small, ethnically diverse groups to work on a mutual project.
   c. As a result, interdependence and cooperation replaced competition, and the children demonstrated higher self-esteem, a lessening of negative stereotypes and prejudice, and a reduction in intergroup hostility.

3. Psychologist Patricia Devine and her colleagues argue that prejudice reduction at the individual level is a three-step process.

   a. Individuals must decide that prejudiced responses are wrong and consciously reject prejudice and stereotyped thinking.
   b. They must internalize their nonprejudiced beliefs so that they become an integral part of their personal self-concept.
   c. Individuals must learn to inhibit automatic prejudicial reactions and deliberately replace them with nonprejudiced responses that are based on their personal standards.

VI. Conformity: Following the Crowd

A. Conformity is the tendency to adjust one’s behavior, attitudes, or beliefs to group norms in response to real or imagined group pressure.

1. Solomon Asch’s classic studies on conformity investigated whether people would still conform to the group even when the group opinion was clearly wrong.
2. Asch’s research, which involved a simple, objective task with an obvious answer (judging the similarity in the lengths of lines), demonstrated the degree to which people will conform to a majority view and the conditions under which conformity is most likely.

B. Factors Influencing Conformity

1. We sometimes find ourselves conforming to the larger group for two basic reasons.
   a. **Normative social influence** refers to behavior that is motivated by the desire to gain social acceptance and approval.
   b. **Informational social influence** refers to behavior that is motivated by the desire to be correct.

2. Conformity is decreased when we have an ally in our dissent from majority opinion, even if the dissenter’s competence is questionable.

C. Culture and Conformity

Meta-analysis indicates that conformity is generally higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic ones.

1. Individualistic cultures tend to emphasize independence, self-expression, and standing out from the crowd; thus, the whole notion of conformity tends to carry a negative connotation.
2. In collectivistic cultures, however, publicly conforming while privately disagreeing tends to be regarded as socially appropriate tact or sensitivity.

VII. Obedience: Just Following Orders

**Obedience** is the performance of an action in response to the direct orders of an authority or person of higher status.

A. Milgram’s Original Obedience Experiment

Social psychologist **Stanley Milgram** conducted one of the most systematic and controversial investigations in the history of psychology: how and why people obey the destructive dictates of an authority figure.

1. Following a “fixed” drawing to determine “teacher,” who was always the real subject, and “learner,” always an accomplice in the experiment, the “learner” was strapped into an “electric chair.”
2. The teacher was then taken to a different room, from which he tested the learner on a simple word-pair memory task.
3. Each time the learner made an error, the teacher was told to deliver a shock, proceeding up the levels listed on the shock generator.
4. At predetermined levels, the learner vocalized his discomfort, then his pain, then agonized screams, and finally dead silence.
5. If the teacher protested, the experimenter told him that he must continue.

B. The Results of Milgram’s Original Experiment

1. Milgram asked psychiatrists, college students, and middle-class adults to predict how subjects would behave.
   a. All three groups predicted that all of Milgram’s subjects would refuse to obey at some point.
   b. None of those surveyed thought that any of Milgram’s subjects
would go to the full 450 volts.
2. They were wrong. Two-thirds of Milgram’s subjects went to the full 450-volt level. Of those who defied the experimenter, not one stopped before the 300-volt level.
3. Milgram’s study has been repeated many times in the United States and other countries with identical results.

C. Making Sense Out of Milgram’s Findings: Multiple Influences
Milgram and others identified several aspects of the experimental situation that had a strong impact on the subjects.
1. A previously well-established framework to obey.
2. The situation, or context, in which the obedience occurred.
3. The gradual, repetitive escalation of the task.
4. The experimenter’s behavior and reassurances.
5. The physical and psychological separation from the learner.

D. Conditions That Undermine Obedience: Variations on a Theme
1. In a lengthy series of experiments involving over 1,000 subjects Milgram systematically varied the basic obedience paradigm.
2. Willingness to obey diminishes sharply when the buffers that separate the teacher from the learner are lessened or removed.
3. When teachers were allowed to act as their own authority and freely choose the shock level, 95 percent did not venture beyond 150 volts—the first point at which the learner protested.
4. People were more likely to defy authority when they saw others do so.

E. Critical Thinking: Abuse at Abu Ghraib: Why Do Ordinary People Commit Evil Acts?
1. Multiple elements at Abu Ghraib combined to foster in-group versus out-group thinking, negative stereotypes, dehumanization, and prejudice.
2. Aggression against prisoners was made to seem patriotic, because the prisoners were supposedly terrorists. By justifying the aggression, this reduced any cognitive dissonance.
3. As demonstrated by Philip Zimbardo in his classic Stanford Prison Experiment, implied social norms were as powerful as direct orders.
4. Some military personnel resisted the pressure to conform. The best way to resist is to be aware of the situational factors that produce the pressure to obey.

The scientific study of conformity and obedience has produced some important insights.
1. Being at odds with the majority or with authority figures is very uncomfortable for most people—enough so that our judgment and perceptions can be distorted and we may act in ways that violate our conscience.
2. Each of us does have the capacity to resist group or authority pressure.

VIII. Helping Behavior: Coming to the Aid of Strangers
The chilling story of Kitty Genovese’s murder triggered hundreds of investigations into the conditions under which people will help others. Those studies began in the 1960s with the pioneering efforts of social psychologists Bibb Latané and John M. Darley.

A. Prosocial behavior describes any behavior that helps another person, whether the underlying motive is self-serving or selfless.

1. Altruism is helping another person with no expectation of personal reward or benefit.
2. Sometimes we help people out of guilt or in order to gain something, such as recognition, rewards, increased self-esteem, or having the favor returned.

B. Factors That Increase the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

1. The “feel good, do good” effect.
2. Feeling guilty.
3. Seeing others who are willing to help.
4. Perceiving the other person as deserving help.
5. Knowing how to help.
6. A personalized relationship with the other person.

C. Factors That Decrease the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

1. The presence of other people. The bystander effect is a phenomenon in which the greater the number of people present, the less likely each individual is to help someone in distress. This seems to occur for two reasons:
   a. diffusion of responsibility, the phenomenon in which the presence of other people makes it less likely that any individual will help someone in distress because the obligation to intervene is shared (or diffused) among all the onlookers.
   b. our desire to behave in a socially acceptable way (normative social influence) and to appear correct (informational social influence).
2. Being in a big city or a very small town.
3. Vague or ambiguous situations.
4. When the personal costs for helping outweigh the benefits.

IX. The Influence of Groups on Individual Behavior

A. Social Loafing: When Individual Effort Is “Lost in the Crowd”

1. Social loafing is the tendency to expend less effort on a task when it is a group effort. As a general rule, the greater the number of people involved in a collective effort, the lower each individual’s output.
2. Social loafing is reduced or eliminated when
   a. the group is composed of people we know.
   b. we are members of a highly valued group.
   c. the task is meaningful or unique.
3. Women are generally less likely to engage in social loafing than are men.
4. Although social loafing is a common phenomenon in individualistic cultures, it is not only absent, but reversed in many collectivistic cultures, in a pattern referred to as social striving.

B. Social Facilitation: Individual Performance in the Presence of Others
   1. **Social facilitation** is the tendency for the presence of other people to enhance individual performance.
   2. When others are watching, a relatively simple or well-rehearsed task tends to be well performed. However, if the task is complex or poorly learned, the opposite effect can occur: The presence of other people is likely to hinder performance.

C. Deindividuation: When Group Members Feel Anonymous
   1. **Deindividuation** is the reduction of self-awareness and inhibition that can occur when a person is part of a group whose members feel anonymous.
   2. It can lead to irresponsible or antisocial behaviors; one way to counteract deindividuation is to heighten self-awareness.

IX. Application: The Persuasion Game
   A. **Persuasion** is the deliberate attempt to influence the attitudes or behavior of another person in a situation in which that person has some freedom of choice.
   B. Professional persuaders often manipulate people’s attitudes and behavior using techniques based on two fundamental social norms:
      1. The **rule of reciprocity** states that if someone gives you something or does you a favor, you feel obligated to return the favor. Strategies based on this social norm include the *door-in-the-face technique* and the *that’s-not-all technique*.
      2. The **rule of commitment** states that once you make a public commitment, there is psychological and interpersonal pressure on you to behave consistently with your earlier commitment. Strategies based on this social norm include the *foot-in-the-door technique* and the *low-ball technique*.
   C. Three Practical Suggestions for Defending Against Persuasion Techniques
      1. Sleep on it.
      2. Play devil’s advocate.
      3. When in doubt, do nothing. Pay attention to your gut feelings.