

## 14-1 ATTITUDES

How do you feel about abortion, same-sex marriage, and exhibiting the Ten Commandments in public buildings such as courthouses? These are hot-button topics because people have strong attitudes toward them. They each give rise to cognitive evaluations (such as approval or disapproval), feelings (such as liking, disliking, or something stronger), and behavioral tendencies (such as approach or avoidance). Although I asked you how you “feel,” attitudes are not just feelings or emotions. Many psychologists view thinking—or judgment—as more basic. Feelings and behavior follow. **Attitudes** are enduring behavioral and cognitive tendencies that are expressed by evaluating particular people, places, or things with favor or disfavor (Bohner & Dickel, 2011).

Attitudes are largely learned, although we may have inborn predispositions to lean one way or another on issues (Kandler et al., 2014; Lewis & Bates, 2013). For example, if you learn that an Apple iPad is a wonderful “toy,” you may feel the urge to buy one. Attitudes can foster love or hate. They can give rise to helping behavior or to mass destruction. They can lead to social conflict or to the resolution of conflicts. Attitudes can change, but not easily.

### 14-1a PREDICTING BEHAVIOR FROM ATTITUDES

Our definition of *attitude* implies that our behavior is consistent with our attitudes. But do people really do as they think? When we are free to do as we wish, the answer is often yes. But as indicated by the term **A-B problem**, there are exceptions. In fact, the links between attitudes (A) and behaviors (B) tend to be weak to moderate (Herr & Fazio, 2013; Petty et al., 2009a, 2009b). People do not always vote “their consciences.” Moreover, research reveals that people who say that drinking alcohol, smoking, and drunken driving are serious threats to their health do not necessarily curb these activities (Kiviniemi & Rothman, 2010).

**Attitude** an enduring mental representation of a person, place, or thing that typically evokes an emotional response and related behavior

**A-B problem** the issue of how well we can predict behavior on the basis of attitudes

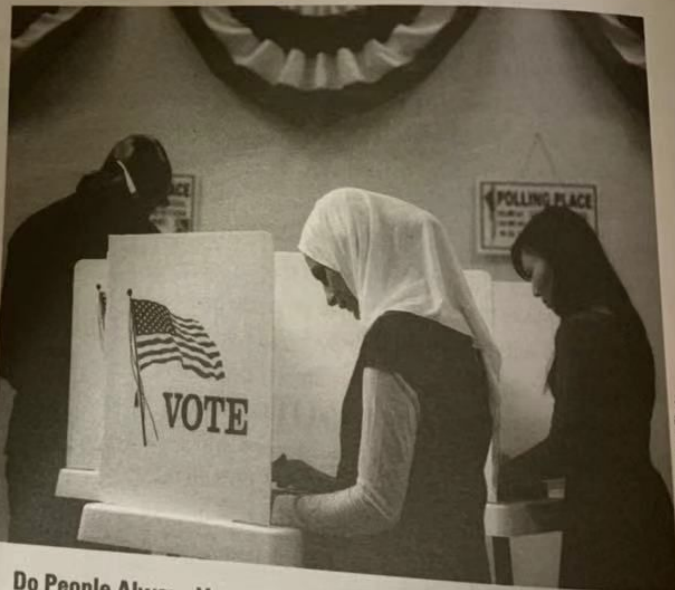
## TRUTH

**T F** People vote their consciences.

It is not always true that people always act in accord with their consciences. The links between attitudes (A) and behaviors (B) tend to be weak to moderate.

Several factors affect the likelihood that we can predict behavior from attitudes (Bardem & Tormala, 2014; Bohner & Dickel, 2011):

1. **Specificity.** We can better predict specific behavior from specific attitudes than from global attitudes. For example, we can better predict church attendance by knowing people’s attitudes toward church attendance than by knowing whether they are Christian.
2. **Strength of attitudes.** Strong attitudes are more likely to determine behavior than weak attitudes. A person who believes that the nation’s destiny depends on Democrats taking control of Congress is more likely to vote than a person who leans toward that party but does not believe that elections make much difference.



### Do People Always Vote Their Conscience?

The A-B problem refers to the research finding that people do not always act in accord with their attitudes.

3. *Vested interest.* People are more likely to act on their attitudes when they have a vested interest in the outcome. People are more likely to vote for (or against) unionization if their workplace when they believe that their job security depends on it.

4. *Accessibility.* People are more likely to behave in accord with their attitudes when they are accessible—that is, when they are brought to mind. This is why politicians attempt to “get out the vote” by means of media blitzes just prior to an election. Attitudes with a strong emotional impact are more accessible, which is one reason that politicians strive to get their supporters “worked up” over issues.

#### 14-1b ATTITUDE FORMATION

Genetics may play some role in attitude formation (Chen & Li, 2014). For example, in terms of the big-five personality traits—which are believed to be partly inherited—political liberals tend to score higher on openness to experience, and political conservatives tend to score higher on conscientiousness (Cooper et al., 2013). Even so, you were not born a conservative or a liberal—although your parents and community may have supported one of these political points of view when you came along. Political, religious, and other attitudes are at least in part learned or derived from cognitive processes.

**CONDITIONING AND OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING** Consider a role for conditioning (Hutter & Sweldens, 2013). Laboratory experiments have shown that attitudes toward national groups can be influenced by associating them with positive words (such as *gift* or *happy*) or negative words (such as *ugly* or *failure*) (De Houwer et al., 2001). Parents often reward children for saying and doing things that agree with their own attitudes. Patriotism is encouraged by showing children approval when they sing the national anthem or wave the flag.

Attitudes formed through direct experience may be stronger and easier to recall, but we also acquire attitudes by observing, listening to, or reading the works of other people. The approval or disapproval of peers leads adolescents to prefer short or long hair, baggy jeans,

**“Let advertisers spend the same amount of money improving their product that they do on advertising and they wouldn’t have to advertise it.”**

Will Rogers, American Humorist, (1879–1935)

or preppy sweaters. How do the things you read in newspapers or hear on the radio influence your attitudes?

**COGNITIVE APPRAISAL** Although genetics and early learning can influence attitudes, attitude formation is not fully mechanical. People are also motivated to understand the environment so that they can make predictions and exercise some control over it (Kuhne & Schemer, 2013). People also sometimes form or change attitudes on the basis of new information (Bolmer & Dickel, 2011;

Horcajo et al., 2014). For example, we may believe that a car is more reliable than we had thought if a survey by *Consumer Reports* finds that it has an excellent repair record. Even so, initial attitudes act as *cognitive anchors* (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). We often judge new ideas in terms of how much they deviate from our existing attitudes. Accepting larger deviations requires more information processing—that is, more intellectual work (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). For this reason, perhaps, great deviations—such as changes from liberal to conservative attitudes, or vice versa—are apt to be resisted.

#### 14-1c CHANGING ATTITUDES THROUGH PERSUASION

The quote from Will Rogers on this page sounds on the mark, but he was probably wrong. It does little good to have a wonderful product if it remains a secret.

The **elaboration likelihood model** describes the ways in which people respond to persuasive messages (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Consider two routes to persuading others to change attitudes. The *central route* inspires thoughtful consideration of arguments and evidence. The *peripheral route* associates objects with positive or negative cues. When politicians avow, “This bill is supported by liberals (or conservatives),” they are seeking predictable, knee-jerk reactions rather than careful consideration of a bill’s merits. Other cues are rewards (such as a smile or a hug), punishments (such as parental disapproval), and such factors as the trustworthiness and attractiveness of the communicator.

**elaboration likelihood model** the view that persuasive messages are evaluated (elaborated) on the basis of central and peripheral cues

Advertisements, which are a form of persuasive communication, also rely on central and peripheral routes. Some ads focus on the quality of the product (central route). Others attempt to associate the product with appealing images (peripheral route). For example, ads for Total cereal, which highlight its nutritional benefits, provide information about the quality of the product, but ads that show football players heading for Disney World or choosing a brand of beer offer no information about the product itself.

In this section, we look at one central factor in persuasion—the nature of the message—and three peripheral factors: the messenger, the context of the message, and the audience.

**THE PERSUASIVE MESSAGE** How do we respond when TV commercials are repeated until we have memorized the dimples on the actors' faces? Research suggests that familiarity breeds content, not contempt (Bohner & Dickel, 2011; Koch & Zerback, 2013). It appears that repeated exposure to people and things as diverse as political candidates, photos of college students, and abstract art enhances their appeal (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2008; Reis et al., 2011).

When trying to persuade someone, is it helpful or self-defeating to alert them to the arguments presented by the opposition? In two-sided arguments, the communicator recounts the arguments of the opposition in an effort to refute them. In research concerning a mock trial, college undergraduates were presented with two-sided arguments—those of the prosecution and those of the defendant (McKenzie et al., 2002). When one argument was weak, the college “jurors” expressed more confidence in their decision than when they did not hear the other side at all. Theologians and politicians sometimes forewarn their followers about the arguments of the opposition

and then refute each one. Forewarning creates a kind of psychological immunity to them (Albarracin & Handley, 2011).

It would be nice to think that people are too sophisticated to be persuaded by

**“Arguments are to be avoided: They are always vulgar and often convincing.”**

Oscar Wilde, Irish Writer and Poet (1854–1900)

emotional factors in attitude formation, but they usually aren't (Ruiter et al., 2014). Consider the **fear appeal**: women who are warned of the dire risk they run if they fail to be screened for breast cancer are more likely to obtain mammograms than women who are informed of the **benefits** of mammography (Ruiter et al., 2014). Interestingly, although sun tanning has been shown to increase the likelihood of

skin cancer, warnings against sun tanning were shown to be more effective when students were warned of risks to their **appearance** (e.g., premature aging, wrinkling, and scarring of the skin) than when the warning dealt with the risk to their health. Fear appeals are most effective when the audience believes that the risks are serious—as in causing wrinkles!—and that the audience members can change their behavior to avert the risks—as in preventing cancer or wrinkling (Ruiter et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2009).

Audiences also tend to believe arguments that appear to run counter to the vested interests of the communicator (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). If the president of Ford or General Motors said that Toyotas and Hondas were superior, you can bet that we would prick up our ears.

**THE PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATOR** Would you go to a doctor who admitted that he or she was behind the times? Research shows that persuasive communicators are characterized by expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, or similarity to their audiences (Petty et al., 2009a, 2009b). Because of the adoration of their fans, sports superstars such as Peyton Manning are the most valuable endorsers.

People find it painful when they are confronted with information that counters their own views. Therefore, they often show **selective avoidance** and **selective exposure** (Knobloch-Westerwick & Johnson, 2014). That is, they switch channels when the news coverage runs counter to

**fear appeal** a type of persuasive communication that influences behavior on the basis of arousing fear instead of rational analysis of the issues

**selective avoidance** diverting one's attention from information that is inconsistent with one's attitudes

**selective exposure** deliberately seeking and attending to information that is consistent with one's attitudes

We often selectively expose ourselves to opinions with which we agree—and vice versa.



their own attitudes. They also seek communicators whose outlook coincides with their own. Whom would you prefer to listen to: Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, or Chris Matthews and Rachel Maddow?

**THE CONTEXT OF THE MESSAGE** You are too shrewd to let someone persuade you by buttering you up, but perhaps someone you know would be influenced by a sip of wine, a bite of cheese, and a sincere compliment. Aspects of the immediate environment, such as music, also increase the likelihood of persuasion. When we are in a good mood, we apparently are less likely to evaluate the situation carefully (Turner et al., 2013).

It is also counterproductive to call your friends foolish when they differ with you—even though their ideas are bound to be “foolish” if they do not agree with yours. Agreement and praise are more effective ways to encourage others to embrace your views.

**THE PERSUADED AUDIENCE** Why can some people say no to salespeople? Why do others enrich the lives of every door-to-door salesperson? It may be that people with high self-esteem and low social anxiety are more likely to resist social pressure (Ellickson et al., 2001). Researchers have also found that people who comply with unreasonable requests are more apt to report thoughts such as (Norton, 2010):

- ▶ “I was worried about what the other person would think of me if I said no.”
- ▶ “It is better to help other people than to be self-centered.”
- ▶ “If I had said no, the other person might have been hurt or insulted.”

People who refuse unreasonable requests reported thoughts like these:

- ▶ “It doesn’t really matter what the other person thinks of me.”
- ▶ “I am perfectly free to say no.”
- ▶ “The request was unreasonable.”

#### 14-1d CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR BY MEANS OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

According to **cognitive-dissonance theory**, people are thinking creatures who seek consistency in their behaviors and their attitudes—that is, their views of the world. People must apparently mentally represent the world accurately to predict and control events. Consistency in beliefs, attitudes, and behavior helps

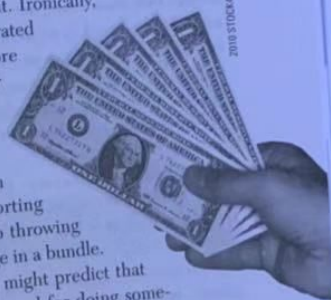
### “The brain within its groove Runs evenly and true ...”

Emily Dickinson, American Poet (1830–1886)

make the world seem like a predictable place. Therefore, if we find ourselves in the uncomfortable spot where two cherished ideas conflict, we are motivated to reduce the discrepancy.

In the first and still one of the best-known studies on cognitive dissonance, one group of participants received \$1 (worth \$5 to \$10 today) for telling someone else that a boring task was interesting (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Members of a second group received \$20 (worth \$100 to \$200 today) to describe the chore positively. Both groups were paid to engage in **attitude-discrepant behavior**—that is, behavior that ran counter to what they actually thought. After presenting their fake enthusiasm for the boring task, the participants were asked to rate their own liking for it. Ironically, those who were paid less rated the task as actually more interesting than their better-paid colleagues reported. Similarly, being compelled by the law to recycle can lead to people’s supporting recycling as opposed to throwing out all trash and garbage in a bundle.

Learning theorists might predict that the more we are reinforced for doing something (given more money, for example), the more we should like it (not find the task quite as boring, that is). But that is not what happened here. Cognitive-dissonance theorists rightly predicted that because the ideas (cognitions) of (a) “I was paid very little” and (b) “I told someone that this assignment was interesting” are dissonant, people will tend to engage in **effort justification**. The discomfort of cognitive dissonance motivates people to explain their behavior to themselves in



**cognitive-dissonance theory** the view that we are motivated to make our cognitions or beliefs consistent with each other and with our behavior

**attitude-discrepant behavior** behavior inconsistent with an attitude that may have the effect of modifying an attitude

**effort justification** in cognitive-dissonance theory, the tendency to seek justification (acceptable reasons) for strenuous efforts

such a way that unpleasant undertakings seem worth it (Stone & Fernandez, 2008). Participants who were paid only \$1 may have justified their lie by concluding that they may not have been lying in the first place.

## TRUTH

**T F** We appreciate things more when we have to work for them.

It is true that we tend to appreciate things more when we have to work for them. This is an example of effort justification.

## 14-2 PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

**Prejudice** is an attitude toward a group that leads people to evaluate members of that group negatively—even though they have never met them. On a cognitive level, prejudice is linked to expectations that members of the target group will behave poorly, say, in the workplace, or engage in criminal behavior or terrorism. On an emotional level, prejudice is associated with negative feelings such as fear, dislike, or hatred. Prejudice is the most troubling kind of attitude.

In behavioral terms, prejudice is connected with avoidance, aggression, and discrimination. **Discrimination** refers to behavior that results from prejudice. Many groups in the United States have experienced discrimination—women, gays and lesbians, older people, and ethnic groups such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, and Native Americans. Discrimination takes many forms, including denial of access to jobs, the voting booth, and housing.

**Prejudice** an attitude toward a group that leads people to evaluate members of that group negatively

**Discrimination** hostile behavior directed against groups toward whom one is prejudiced

**stereotyping** erroneous assumptions that all members of a group share the same traits or characteristics

## 14-2a STEREOTYPING

Prejudice involves **stereotyping**—that is, erroneous assumptions that all members of a group share the same traits or characteristics. Have people you know characterized African Americans as superstitious and musical? What about gays and lesbians? Are they unfit for military service? Stereotypes may lead people to view members of groups in a biased fashion.

On the other hand, some stereotypes are positive, such as stereotypes about physically attractive people. By and large, we assume that “good things come in pretty packages.” Attractive children and adults are judged and treated more positively than their unattractive peers (Rennels & Langlois, 2014). We expect attractive people to be poised, sociable, popular, intelligent, mentally healthy, fulfilled, persuasive, and successful in their jobs and marriages (Principe & Langlois, 2011). Attractive people are also more likely to be judged innocent of crimes in mock jury experiments, and when they are found guilty, they are given less severe sentences (Goodman-Delahunty & Sporer, 2010).

## 14-2b SOURCES OF PREJUDICE

The sources of prejudice are many and varied (Duriez, 2011; Stangor & Crandall, 2013):

1. **Dissimilarity.** We are apt to like people who share our attitudes. People of different religions and races often have different backgrounds, however, giving rise to dissimilar attitudes. Even when people of different races share important values, people may assume that they do not.
2. **Social conflict.** There is often social and economic conflict between people of different races and religions.

## TRUTH

**T F** People have condemned billions of other people without ever meeting them or learning their names.

It is true that people have condemned billions of other people without ever meeting them or learning their names. Such condemnation occurs because of prejudice against groups of people. Prejudice is connected with the genocide of millions.

3. **Social learning.** Children acquire some attitudes from other people, especially their parents. Children tend to imitate their parents, and parents reinforce their children for doing so. In this way prejudices can be transmitted from generation to generation.



#### Amanda Knox Appearing on NBC's *Today Show*.

In 2009, Knox was convicted in an Italian court of killing her roommate. Her conviction was overturned in 2011, but then, in 2014, she was found guilty again. Because of her beauty, many observers find it difficult to believe that Knox is actually guilty. Why, one might think, would someone this beautiful have to resort to crime to achieve her ends?

4. **Information processing.** Prejudices act as cognitive filters through which we view the social world. We tend to think of people as "familiar" or "foreign," or "good" or "bad." Our feelings and reactions toward others may be biased by these perceptions.
5. **Social categorization.** We also tend to divide our social world into "us" and "them." People usually view those who belong to their own groups—the "in-group"—more favorably than those who do not—the "out-group." Isolation from the out-group makes it easier to maintain our stereotypes.

### 14-3 ATTRACTION AND LOVE

Attitudes of liking and loving can lead to important, lasting relationships. They are the flip side of the coin of prejudice—positive attitudes that are associated with interpersonal **attraction** rather than avoidance. Among the factors contributing to attraction are physical appearance, similarity, and reciprocity.

#### 14-3a PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Physical appearance is a key factor in attraction and in the consideration of romantic partners (Fales et al., 2016; Meltz et al., 2014). What determines physical

allure? Are our standards subjective—that is, "in the eye of the beholder"? Or is there general agreement on what is appealing?

Many standards for beauty appear to be cross-cultural (Buss, 2009; Singh & Singh, 2011). For example, a study of people in England and Japan found that both British and Japanese men consider women with large eyes, high cheekbones, and narrow jaws to be most attractive (Perrett, 1994). In his research, Perrett created computer composites of the faces of 60 women and, as shown in part A of Figure 14.1, of the 15 women who were rated the most attractive. He then used computer enhancement to exaggerate the differences between the composite of the 60 and the composite of the 15 most attractive women. He arrived at the image shown in part B of Figure 14.1. Part B, which shows higher cheekbones and a narrower jaw than part A, was rated as

the most attractive image. Similar results were found for the image of a Japanese woman. Works of art suggest that the ancient Greeks and Egyptians favored similar facial features.

### FICTION

**T F** Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

It turns out not to be true that standards for beauty are so flexible that they are fully "in the eye of the beholder." There are some cross-cultural commonalities in standards for attractiveness.

In a survey of 22,815 U.S. adults, it was found that men and women both said that it is desirable or essential for potential partners to be slender (80% of men and 58% of women) (Fales et al., 2016). European American males are more likely than African and Latin American males to want to date slender and buff women.

**attraction** In social psychology, an attitude of liking or disliking (negative attraction)

**FIG. 14.1 WHAT FEATURES CONTRIBUTE TO FACIAL ATTRACTIVENESS?**



The Perrett study found that in both England and Japan, features such as large eyes, high cheekbones, and narrow jaws contribute to perceptions of the attractiveness of women. Part A shows a composite of the faces of 15 women rated as the most attractive of a group of 60. Part B is a composite in which the features of these 15 women are exaggerated—that is, developed further in the direction that separates them from the average of the entire 60.

African and Latin American men are significantly more likely to be interested in women with large or thick bodies.

#### 14-3b GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELECTION OF A ROMANTIC PARTNER

Physical appearance may be a major factor in the selection of a romantic partner, but cross-cultural studies on mate selection find that women tend to place greater emphasis on traits such as professional status, consideration, dependability, kindness, and fondness for children. Men tend to place relatively greater emphasis on physical allure, cooking ability, even thrift (Buss & Schmitt, 2011). U.S. women are more willing than U.S. men to marry someone who is not good-looking, but less willing to marry someone who does not hold a steady job (Sprecher & Felmlee, 2008).

Why do males tend to place relatively more emphasis than females on physical appearance in mate selection? Why do females tend to place relatively more emphasis on personal factors such as financial status and reliability?

Evolutionary psychologists believe that evolutionary forces favor the survival of women who desire status in their mates and men who emphasize physical allure because these preferences provide reproductive advantages. According to the "parental investment model," a woman's appeal is more strongly connected with her age and health, both of which are markers of reproductive capacity. The value of men as reproducers, however, is more intertwined with factors that contribute to a stable environment for child rearing—such as social standing and reliability (Conroy-Beam et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2012).

#### 14-3c THE ATTRACTION-SIMILARITY HYPOTHESIS

The *attraction-similarity hypothesis* holds that people tend to develop romantic relationships with people who are similar to themselves in physical attractiveness and other traits (Sprecher et al., 2015).

Apparently, and sex partners tend to be similar to us in race and ethnicity, age, level of education, and religion (Montoya & Horton, 2013). Nearly 95% of marriages and 80% to 90% of cohabiting unions were between partners of the same race at the time of the 2010 U.S. census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Highly educated people are more likely than poorly educated people to marry people of other races (Qian et al., 2012).

Another reason people tend to have partners from the same background is *propinquity*. Marriages are

### FICTION

**T F** Opposites attract.

Actually, it is not true that opposites attract. People who share attitudes are more likely to be attracted to one another.

## When It Comes to Sex, Red May Mean "Go"

When you go to buy a box of Valentine's Day candy, what color will the box be? Green? Blue? The answer, of course, is red. What is the most popular color of women's lipstick? Yellow? Brown? Again, the answer is red (Elliot, 2015). Red has been the most popular lipstick color since the construction of the pyramids in ancient Egypt (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). At a traffic light, the color red means *stop*. But when it comes to sexual attraction, the color red is more likely to mean *go*.

Why is the color red associated with feelings of attraction? The link between red and physical attraction may be rooted in our biological heritage. Many female primates, including baboons, chimpanzees, gorillas, and rhesus monkeys, show reddened genital regions when they are nearing ovulation—the time of the month when they are fertile (Barelli et al., 2008). Reddening of the skin is caused by elevated estrogen levels, which increase the blood flow under the skin. Male primates are more likely to attempt sexual relations with females who display red (Waite et al., 2006). Women's estrogen levels are also elevated near ovulation, slightly reddening the skin (Lynn et al., 2007). For men, as with other male primates, the reddening of a woman's skin at the time of ovulation may be a sexual signal. And women are more likely to choose to wear the color red when they wish to appear to be more sexually attractive (Elliot et al., 2013).

Experiments find that men rate the same woman as more attractive when her photograph is shown against a red background as opposed to other colors (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). Women also rate photos of men as more attractive when the photos are bordered in red or the men are wearing red clothing (Eliot et al., 2010). The male sex hormone testosterone is involved in oxygenating blood and increasing its flow to the



### Why Did They Deck Her Out in Red?

Cultural conditioning and the human biological heritage provide two good answers.

skin—giving off a reddish hue—and to the genitals, leading to sexual excitement. Red coloration can signal good health in men because high blood levels of oxygen are maintained only by organisms in good health (Elliot, 2015).

made in the neighborhood and not in heaven (Sprecher & Felmlee, 2008). We tend to live among people who are similar to us in background, and we therefore come into contact with them more often.

*Reciprocity* is another powerful determinant of attraction (Fehr, 2008). We tend to be more open, warm, and helpful when we are interacting with people who seem to like us (Sprecher et al., 2008).

## 14-3d LOVE

Love is a strong positive emotion. We had a look at love between children and parents in Chapter 9. Here we will focus on that most dramatic, heated, passionate love we label *romantic love*.

There are a number of theories about romantic love. One theory is Robert Sternberg's (1988, 2013)

**triangular model of love**, which can be thought of as a different kind of love triangle. This love triangle does not refer to two men wooing the same woman. It refers to Sternberg's view that love involves three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment (see Figure 14.2).

**Intimacy** refers to a couple's closeness, to their mutual concern and sharing of feelings and resources. **Passion** means romance and sexual feelings. **Commitment** means deciding to enhance and maintain the relationship. Passion is most crucial in short-term relationships. Intimacy and commitment are more important in enduring relationships. The ideal form of love—**consummate love**—combines all three. Consummate love is made up of romantic love plus commitment.

**Romantic love**, in Sternberg's scheme, is characterized by passion and intimacy. Passion involves fascination (preoccupation with the loved one), sexual craving, and the desire for exclusiveness (Berscheid, 2009). Intimacy involves closeness and caring—championing the interests of the loved one, even if it entails sacrificing

one's own. People are cognitively biased toward evaluating their partners positively (Acevedo et al., 2012). That is, we idealize those we love.

## 14-4 SOCIAL PERCEPTION

An important area of social psychology concerns the ways in which we perceive other people—for example, the importance of the first impressions they make on us. Next we explore some factors that contribute to **social perception**: the primacy and recency effects and attribution theory.

### 14-4a PRIMACY AND RECENCY EFFECTS

Why do you wear a suit to a job interview? Why do defense attorneys make sure that their clients dress neatly and get their hair cut before they are seen by the jury? Do first impressions really matter? Apparently they do—a great deal.

**triangular model of love** Sternberg's view that love involves combinations of three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment

**Intimacy** close acquaintance and familiarity; a characteristic of a relationship in which partners share their innermost feelings

**Passion** strong romantic and sexual feelings

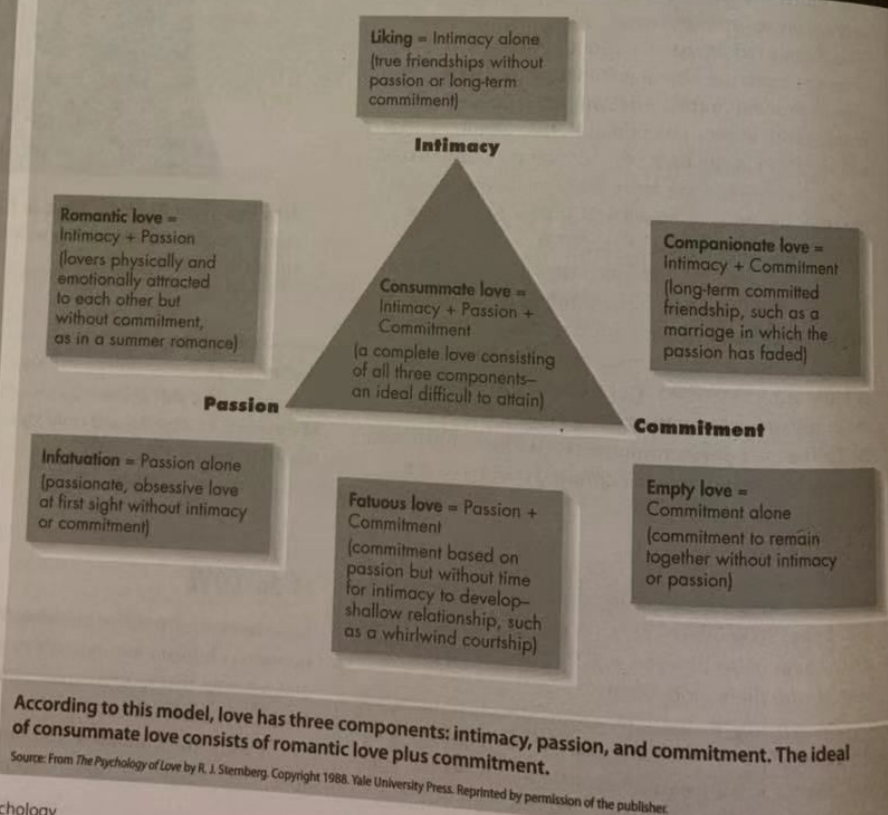
**Commitment** the decision to maintain a relationship

**consummate love** the ideal form of love within Sternberg's model, which combines passion, intimacy, and commitment

**Romantic love** an intense, positive emotion that involves sexual attraction, feelings of caring, and the belief that one is in love

**social perception** a subfield of social psychology that studies the ways in which we form and modify impressions of others

FIG.14.2 THE TRIANGULAR MODEL OF LOVE



Whether we are talking about the business or social worlds, or even the relationship between a therapist and a client, first impressions are important (Bidell et al., 2002). First impressions are an example of the **primacy effect**—the tendency to evaluate others in terms of first impressions.

Participants in a classic experiment on the primacy effect read different stories about “Jim” (Luchins, 1957). The stories consisted of one or two paragraphs. The one-paragraph stories portrayed Jim as either friendly or unfriendly. These paragraphs were also used in the two-paragraph stories, but in this case the paragraphs were read in the reverse order. Of those reading only the “friendly” paragraph, 95% rated Jim as friendly. Of those who read just the “unfriendly” paragraph, 3% rated him as friendly. Seventy-eight percent of those who read two-paragraph stories in the “friendly-unfriendly” order labeled Jim as friendly. When participants read the paragraphs in the reverse order, only 18% rated Jim as friendly.

How can we encourage people to pay more attention to impressions occurring after the first encounter? Abraham Luchins accomplished this by allowing time to pass between the presentations of the two paragraphs. In this way, fading memories allowed more recent information to take precedence. The tendency to respond to the most freshly presented piece of information is known as the **recency effect**. Luchins also found a second way to counter first impressions: He simply asked participants to avoid making snap judgments and to weigh all the evidence.

#### 14-4b ATTRIBUTION THEORY

An **attribution** is an assumption or belief about why people behave in a certain way. When you assume that one child is mistreating another child because she is “mean,” you are making an attribution. This section focuses on *attribution theory*, or the processes by which people draw conclusions about the factors that influence one another’s behavior. Attribution theory is important because attributions lead us to perceive others either as purposeful actors or as victims of circumstances.

**DISPOSITIONAL AND SITUATIONAL ATTRIBUTIONS** Social psychologists describe two types of attributions. **Dispositional attributions** ascribe a person’s behavior to internal factors such as personality traits and free will. If you assume that one child is mistreating another because she is “mean,” you are making a dispositional attribution. **Situational attributions**

attribute a person’s actions to external factors such as circumstances, social influence, or socialization. If you assume that one child is mistreating the other because her parents have given her certain attitudes toward the other child, you are making a situational attribution.

**THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR** In cultures that view the self as independent, such as ours, people tend to make dispositional attributions: they tend to attribute other people’s behavior primarily to internal factors such as personality, attitudes, and free will (Reeder, 2013; Uleman et al., 2012). This bias in the attribution process is known as the **fundamental attribution error**. For example, if a teenager gets into trouble with the law, individualistic societies are more likely to blame the teenager than the social environment in which the teenager lives.

One reason for the fundamental attribution error is that we tend to infer traits from behavior. But in collectivist cultures that stress interdependence, such as Asian cultures, people are more likely to attribute another person’s behavior to that person’s social roles and obligations (Basic Behavioral Science Task Force, 1996). For example, Japanese people might be more likely to attribute a businessperson’s extreme competitiveness to the “culture of business” rather than to his or her personality.

#### THE ACTOR-OBSERVER EFFECT

We noted that we are biased toward making dispositional attributions when we are explaining other people’s behavior. When we see other people doing things that we do not like, we tend to judge them as willful actors (Baron et al., 2009). But when we find ourselves doing things that we ordinarily disapprove of, we tend to see ourselves as victims of circumstances (Baron et al., 2009). The combination of the tendency to attribute other people’s behavior to

**primacy effect** the tendency to evaluate others in terms of first impressions

**recency effect** the tendency to evaluate others in terms of the most recent impression

**attribution** a belief concerning why people behave in a certain way

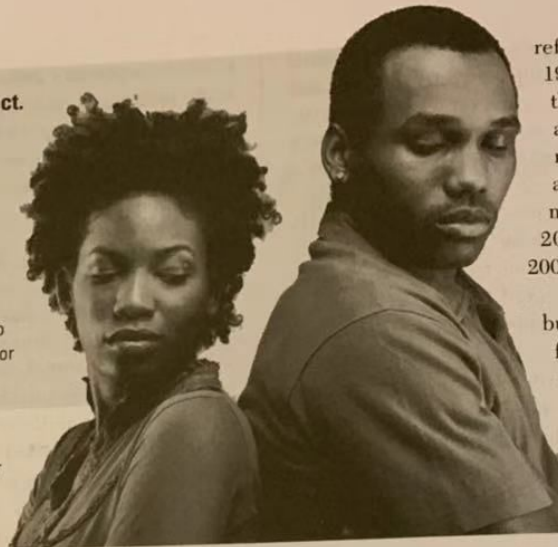
**Dispositional attribution** an assumption that a person’s behavior is determined by internal causes such as personal traits

**Situational attribution** an assumption that a person’s behavior is determined by external circumstances such as the social pressure found in a situation

**fundamental attribution error** the assumption that others act predominantly on the basis of their dispositions, even when there is evidence suggesting the importance of their situations

### The Actor–Observer Effect.

Who is at fault here? People tend to make dispositional attributions for other people's behavior, but they tend to see their own behavior as motivated by situational factors. People are aware of the external forces acting on themselves, but they tend to attribute other people's behavior to choice and will.



dispositional factors and our own behavior to situational influences is called the **actor–observer effect**.

Consider an example.

Parents and children often argue about the children's choice of friends or dates. When they do, the parents tend to infer traits from behavior and to see the children as stubborn and resistant. The children also infer traits from behavior. Thus, they may see their parents as bossy and controlling. Parents and children alike attribute the others' behavior to internal causes. That is, both make dispositional attributions about other people's behavior.

How do the parents and teenagers perceive themselves? The parents probably see themselves as being forced into combat by their children's foolishness. If they become insistent, it is in response to the teens' stubbornness. The teenagers probably see themselves as responding to peer pressures. Both parents and children make situational attributions for their own behavior.

**THE SELF-SERVING BIAS** There is also a **self-serving bias** in the attribution process. We are likely to ascribe

**actor–observer effect** the tendency to attribute our own behavior to situational factors but to attribute the behavior of others to dispositional factors

**self-serving bias** the tendency to view one's successes as stemming from internal factors and one's failures as stemming from external factors

**Social influence** the area of social psychology that studies the ways in which people influence the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others

our successes to internal, dispositional factors but our failures to external, situational influences (Kestemont et al., 2014; Korn et al., 2016). A study of 27 college wrestlers found that they tended to attribute their wins to stable and internal conditions such as their abilities, but their losses to unstable and external conditions such as an error by a

referee (De Michele et al., 1998). Sports fans fall into the same trap. They tend to attribute their team's victories to internal conditions and their losses to external conditions (Rees et al., 2005; Wallace & Hinsz, 2009).

Another interesting attribution bias is a gender difference in attributions for friendly behavior. Men are more likely than women to interpret a woman's smile or friendliness toward a man as flirting (Frisby et al., 2010).

## TRUTH

**T F** We tend to hold others responsible for their misdeeds but to see ourselves as victims of circumstances when we misbehave.

It is true that we tend to hold others responsible for their misdeeds and to see ourselves as victims of circumstances when we misbehave. This tendency is termed the *actor–observer effect*.

## 14-5 SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Other people and groups can exert enormous pressure on us to behave according to their norms. **Social influence** is the area of social psychology that studies the ways in which people alter the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others (Nolan et al., 2008). Let's examine a couple of classic experiments that demonstrate how people influence others to engage in destructive obedience or conform to social norms.

### 14-5a OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

Throughout history, soldiers have followed orders—even when it comes to slaughtering innocent civilians. The Turkish slaughter of Armenians, the Nazi slaughter of Jews, the mutual slaughter of Hutus and Tutsis in

Rwanda—these are all examples of the tragedies that can arise from simply following orders. We may say we are horrified by such crimes, and we cannot imagine why people engage in them. But how many of us would refuse to follow orders issued by authority figures?

**THE MILGRAM STUDIES** Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram also wondered how many people would resist immoral requests made by authority figures. To find out, he undertook a series of classic experiments at the university that have become known as the Milgram studies on obedience.

In an early phase of his work, Milgram (1963) placed ads in local newspapers for people who would be willing to participate in studies on learning and memory. He enlisted 40 people ranging in age from 20 to 50—teachers, engineers, laborers, salespeople, people who had not completed elementary school, and people with graduate degrees.

Let's suppose that you have answered the ad. You show up at the university in exchange for a reasonable fee (\$4.50, which in the early 1960s might easily fill your gas tank) and to satisfy your own curiosity. You might be impressed. After all, Yale is a venerable institution that dominates the city. You are no less impressed by the elegant labs, where you meet a distinguished behavioral scientist dressed in a white coat and another person who has responded to the ad. The scientist explains that the purpose of the experiment is to study the *effects of punishment on learning*. The experiment requires a "teacher" and a "learner." By chance, you are appointed the teacher and the other recruit, the learner.

You, the scientist, and the learner enter a laboratory room containing a threatening chair with dangling straps. The scientist straps the learner in. The learner expresses some concern, but this is, after all, for the sake of science. And this is Yale, isn't it? What could happen to a person at Yale?

You follow the scientist to an adjacent room, from which you are to do your "teaching." This teaching promises to have an impact. You are to punish the learner's errors by pressing levers marked from 15 to 450 volts on a fearsome-looking console. Labels describe 28 of the 30 levers as running the gamut from "Slight Shock" to "Danger: Severe Shock." The last two levers are simply labeled "XXX." Just in case you have no idea what electric shock feels like, the scientist gives you a sample 45-volt shock. It stings. You pity the person who might receive more.

Your learner is expected to learn pairs of words, which are to be read from a list.

## Suicide Terrorists: Evil? Ordinary? Both?

Why did 19 men fly into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? Was it a matter of personality and personal choice? Was it a web of situational factors? Were they evil? Social psychologists who have studied the nature of evil find that many—perhaps most—perpetrators of evil are "ordinary people" (Baumeister, 1996; Berkowitz, 2004b).

How can this be true? When we seek to "profile" someone, we might be making a fundamental attribution error—that is, we attribute too much of other people's behavior to internal factors such as attitude and choice (Gilovich & Eibach, 2001; Reeder, 2013). Indeed, in 2003, the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) testified to Congress that they had to conclude there was no clear profile of the suicide terrorist.

Can you also apply the social psychology concepts of polarization, groupthink, and diffusion of responsibility in the explanation of suicide terrorism?

The 9/11 Memorial, on the site of the towers that fell.



After hearing the list once, the learner is to produce the word that pairs with the stimulus word from a list of four alternatives. This is done by pressing a switch that lights one of four panels in your room. If it is the correct panel, you proceed to the next stimulus word. If not, you are to deliver an electric shock. With each error, you are to increase the voltage of the shock (see Figure 14.3).

You probably have some misgivings. Electrodes have been strapped to the learner's wrists, and the scientist has applied electrode paste "to avoid blisters and burns." You have also been told that the shocks will cause "no permanent tissue damage," although they might be painful. Still, the learner is going along. And after all, this is Yale.

The learner answers some items correctly and then makes some errors. With mild concern you press the levers up through 45 volts. You've tolerated that much yourself. Then a few more mistakes are made. You press the 60-volt lever, then 75. The learner makes another mistake. You pause and look at the scientist, who is reassuring: "Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on." The learner makes more errors, and soon you are up to a shock of 300 volts. But now the learner is pounding on the other side of the wall! Your chest tightens, and you begin to perspire. "Damn science and the \$4.50!" you think. You hesitate and the scientist says, "The experiment requires that you continue." After the delivery of the next stimulus word, the learner chooses no answer at all. What are you to do? "Wait for 5 to 10 seconds," the scientist instructs, "and then treat no answer as a wrong answer." But after the next shock the pounding on the wall resumes! Now your heart is racing, and you are convinced you are causing extreme pain and discomfort. Is it possible that no lasting damage is being done? Is the experiment that important, after all? What to do? You hesitate again, and the scientist says, "It is absolutely essential that you continue." His voice is very convincing.

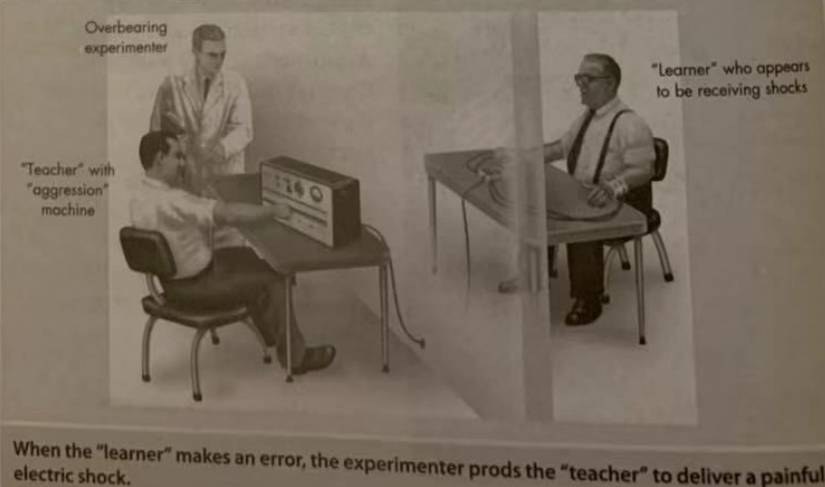
"You have no other choice," he says, "you must go on." You can barely think straight, and for some unaccountable reason you feel laughter rising in your throat. Your finger shakes above the lever. *What are you to do?*

Milgram had foreseen that some "teachers" in his experiment would hesitate. He had therefore conceived standardized statements that his assistants would use when participants balked—for example: "Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on." "The experiment requires that you continue." "It is absolutely essential that you continue." "You have no other choice; you must go on."

To repeat: If you are a teacher in the Milgram study, what do you do? Milgram (1963, 1974) found out what most people in his sample would do. The sample was a cross-section of the male population of New Haven. Of the 40 men in this phase of his research, only 5 refused to go beyond the 300-volt level, the level at which the learner first pounded the wall. Nine other "teachers" defied the scientist within the 300-volt range. But 65% of the participants complied with the scientist throughout the series, believing they were delivering 450-volt, XXX-rated shocks.

Were these participants unfeeling? Not at all. Milgram was impressed by their signs of stress. They trembled, they stuttered, they bit their lips. They groaned, they sweated, they dug their fingernails into their flesh. Some had fits of laughter, although laughter was inappropriate. One salesperson's laughter was so convulsive that he could not continue with the experiment.

FIG.14.3 THE EXPERIMENTAL SETUP IN THE MILGRAM STUDIES



When the "learner" makes an error, the experimenter prods the "teacher" to deliver a painful electric shock.

Milgram's initial research on obedience was limited to a sample of New Haven men. Could he generalize his findings to other men or to women? Would college students, who are considered to be independent thinkers, show more defiance? A replication of Milgram's study with a sample of Yale men yielded similar results. What about women, who are supposedly less aggressive than men? In subsequent research, women, too, administered shocks to the learners. All this took place in a nation that values independence and free will.

## TRUTH

**T F** Most people will torture an innocent person if they are ordered to do so.

It appears to be true that most people will torture an innocent person, just because they are ordered to do so.

**ON DECEPTION AND TRUTH** I have said that the "teachers" in the Milgram studies *believed* that they were shocking other people when they pressed the levers on the console. They weren't. The only real shock in this experiment was the 45-volt sample given to the teachers. Its purpose was to make the procedure believable.

The learners in the experiment were actually *confederates* of the experimenter. They had not answered the newspaper ads but were in on the truth from the start. The "teachers" were the only real participants. They were led to believe they had been chosen at random for the teacher role, but the choice was rigged so that newspaper recruits would always become teachers.

Milgram debriefed his participants after the experiment was complete. He explained the purpose and methods of his research in detail. He emphasized the fact that they had not actually harmed anyone. Of course the participants did believe that they were hurting other people as the experiment was being carried out. As you can imagine, the ethics of the Milgram studies have been debated by psychologists for decades. College and university review committees might prevent similar experiments from being conducted today.

**WHY DID PEOPLE IN THE MILGRAM STUDIES OBEY THE EXPERIMENTERS?** Many people obey the commands of others even when they are required to perform immoral tasks. But *why*? Why did Germans "just follow orders" during the Holocaust? Why did "teachers" obey

the experimenter in Milgram's study? We do not have all the answers, but we can offer a number of hypotheses:

1. **Socialization.** Despite the expressed American ideal of independence, we are socialized from early childhood to obey authority figures such as parents and teachers (Beque et al., 2015; Perlstadt, 2013).
2. **Lack of social comparison.** In Milgram's experimental settings, experimenters displayed command of the situation, but "teachers" (participants) did not have the opportunity to compare their ideas and feelings with those of other people in the same situation.
3. **Perception of legitimate authority.** An experimenter at Yale might have appeared to be a highly legitimate authority figure—as might a government official or a high-ranking officer in the military (Blass, 2009). The percentage of individuals who complied with the experimenter's demands dropped from 65% to 48% when Milgram (1974) replicated the study in a dingy storefront in a nearby town. Even in that setting, many people are willing to engage in morally reprehensible acts at the behest of a legitimate-looking authority figure. Hitler and his henchmen were authority figures in Nazi Germany. "Science" and Yale University legitimized the authority of the experimenters in the Milgram studies.
4. **The foot-in-the-door technique.** The **foot-in-the-door technique** might also have contributed to the obedience of the teachers (Burger, 2009). Once they had begun to deliver shocks to learners, they might have found it progressively more difficult to extricate themselves from the situation.
5. **Inaccessibility of values.** People are more likely to act in accordance with their attitudes when their attitudes are readily available, or accessible. Most people believe it is wrong to harm innocent people, but strong emotions impair clear thinking. As the teachers in the Milgram experiments became more emotionally involved, their attitudes might thus have become less "accessible."
6. **Buffers between the perpetrator and the victim.** Several buffers decreased the effect of the learners' pain on the teachers. For example, the "learners" were in another room. When they were in the same room with the teachers, their compliance rate dropped from 65% to 40%. Moreover, when the teacher held the learner's hand on the shock plate, the compliance rate dropped to 30%.

**foot-in-the-door technique**  
a method for inducing compliance in which a small request is followed by a larger request

## 14-5b CONFORMITY

We are said to *conform* when we change our behavior to adhere to *social norms*. Social norms are widely accepted expectations concerning social behavior. Explicit social norms are often made into rules and laws such as those that require us to whisper in libraries and to slow down when driving past a school. There are also unspoken or implicit social norms, such as those that cause us to face the front in an elevator or to be "fashionably late" for social gatherings. Can you think of some instances in which you have conformed to social pressure?

The tendency to conform to social norms is often good. Many norms have evolved because they promote comfort and survival. Group pressure can also promote maladaptive behavior, as when people engage in risky behavior because "everyone is doing it." Why do so many people tend to follow the crowd? To answer this question, let us look at a classic experiment on conformity conducted by Solomon Asch in the early 1950s.

**THE ASCH STUDY** Can you believe what you see with your own eyes? Seeing is believing, isn't it? Not if you were a participant in Asch's (1952) study.

Let's say you entered a laboratory room with seven other subjects, supposedly taking part in an experiment on visual discrimination. At the front of the room stood a man holding cards with lines drawn on them.

The eight of you were seated in a series. You were given the seventh seat, a minor fact at the time. The man explained the task. There was a single line on the card on the left. Three lines were drawn on the card at the right (see Figure 14.4). One line on the right card was the same length as the line on the left card. You and the other participants were to call out, one at a time, which of the three lines—1, 2, or 3—was the same length as the one on the card on the left. Simple.

The participants to your right spoke out in order: "3," "3," "3," "3," "3," "3." Now it was your turn. Line 3 was clearly the same length

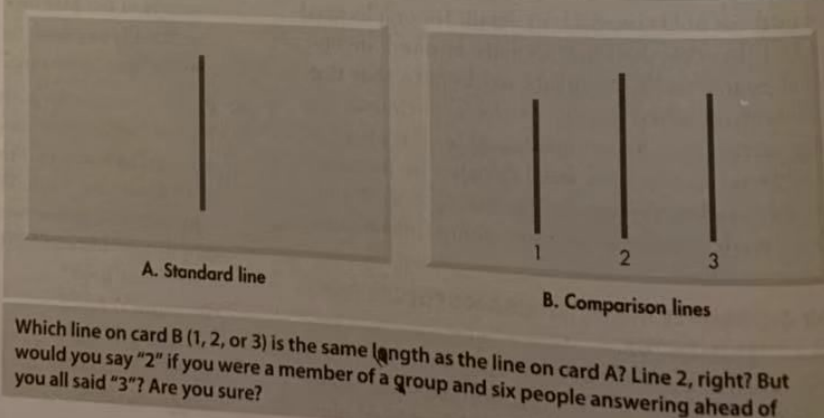
as the line on the first card, so you said "3." The fellow after you then chimed in: "3." That's all there was to it. Then two other cards were set up at the front of the room. This time line 2 was clearly the same length as the line on the first card. The answers were "2," "2," "2," "2," "2," "2." Again it was your turn. You said "2," and perhaps your mind began to wander. Your stomach was gurgling a bit. The fellow after you said "2."

Another pair of cards was held up. Line 3 was clearly the correct answer. The people on your right spoke in turn: "1," "1 ..." Wait a second! "... 1," "1." You forgot about dinner and studied the lines briefly. No, line 1 was too short by a good half-inch. But the next two participants said "1" and suddenly it was your turn. Your hands had become sweaty, and there was a lump in your throat. You wanted to say "3," but was it right? There was really no time, and you had already paused noticeably. You said "1," and so did the last fellow.

Now your attention was riveted on the task. Much of the time you agreed with the other judges, but sometimes you did not. And for some reason beyond your understanding, they were in perfect agreement even when they were wrong—assuming you could trust your eyes. The experiment was becoming an uncomfortable experience, and you began to doubt your judgment.

The discomfort in the Asch study was caused by the pressure to conform. Actually, the other seven recruits were confederates of the experimenter. They prearranged a number of incorrect responses. The sole purpose of the study was to see whether you would conform to the erroneous group judgments.

FIG.14.4 CARDS USED IN THE ASCH STUDY ON CONFORMITY



Yet children also fear punishment and loss of love, so they repress most aggressive impulses and store them in the unconscious recesses of the mind.

Cognitive psychologists assert that our behavior is influenced by our values, by how we interpret situations, and by choice. People who believe that aggression is sometimes necessary and justified—as during wartime—are likely to act aggressively. People who believe that a particular war or act of aggression is unjust, or who oppose aggression under all circumstances, are less likely to behave aggressively (Hurka, 2010; Maxwell et al., 2009).

People also decide—sometimes making split-second decisions—whether they will lash out or not on the basis of their interpretation of the other person's motives. But many individuals who act aggressively distort other people's motives. For example, they assume that other people wish them harm when they actually do not (Dodge & Godwin, 2013). We are more likely to respond aggressively to a provocation when we magnify the importance of the "insult" or otherwise stir up feelings of anger (Ellis et al., 2009). How do you respond when someone bumps into you? If you view it as an intentional insult to your honor, you may respond with aggression.

From the behavioral perspective, learning is acquired through reinforcement. Organisms that are reinforced for aggressive behavior are more likely to behave aggressively in situations similar to those in which reinforcement occurs. Strong, agile organisms are likely to be reinforced for aggressive behavior.

Among nonhumans reinforcement is usually physical—for example, food, mating, or escaping a predator. Humans respond to such reinforcements but also to other reinforcers, such as social approval. Children are less likely to act aggressively when teachers and classmates communicate strong disapproval of aggressive behavior (Henry, 2008; Simon et al., 2009). From the social-cognitive perspective, aggressive skills are mainly acquired by observation of other people acting aggressively. However, social-cognitive theorists—like other cognitive theorists—believe that consciousness and choice play key roles in aggressive behavior among humans. Social-cognitive theorists believe that we are not likely to act aggressively unless we believe that aggression is appropriate under the circumstances and likely to be reinforced.

Situational factors also contribute to aggression. The Milgram studies showed us that the majority of "normal" people will act aggressively when they are influenced by other people to do so. In the section on group behavior, we will see that people may also act more aggressively when they are members of a mob.

## 14-6c COMBATING PREJUDICE

Prejudice has been with us throughout history, and it is unlikely that a miracle cure is at hand. Yet we need not stand idly by when we witness prejudice. We can create millions of mini-miracles—changes in those of us who wish to end prejudice. Here are some things we can do to combat prejudice:

1. *Encourage intergroup contact and cooperation.* Prejudice encourages us to avoid other groups, which is unfortunate because intergroup contact is one way of breaking down prejudices (Pettigrew, 2016). Intergroup contact heightens awareness of individual variation, and this knowledge can lead us to abandon stereotypical thinking. Intergroup contact is especially effective when people are striving to meet common goals, such as playing on the same team or working together on a yearbook.
2. *Present examples of admired individuals within groups that are often stigmatized.* Nilanjana Dasgupta and Anthony G. Greenwald found that they could modify negative attitudes toward African Americans by presenting photographs of admired African American individuals (Hardin & Banaji, 2013). Verbal reminders should work as well.
3. *Attack discriminatory behavior.* It is sometimes easier to change people's behavior than to alter their feelings. Yet cognitive-dissonance theory suggests that when we change people's behavior, their feelings may follow along (Barkan et al., 2015). It is illegal to deny access to education, jobs, and housing on the basis of gender, religion, race, or disability. Seek legal remedies if you have been discriminated against.
4. *Hold discussion forums.* Many campuses conduct workshops and discussion groups on gender, race, and diversity. Talk to your dean of students about holding such workshops.
5. *Examine your own beliefs.* Prejudice isn't "out there." It dwells within us. It is easy to focus on the prejudices of others, but what about our own? Have you examined your own attitudes and rejected stereotyping and prejudice?

Even if we do not personally harbor feelings of racial or religious enmity, are we doing anything to counter such feelings in others? Do we confront people who make prejudiced remarks? Do we belong to organizations that deny access to members of other racial and religious groups? Do we strike up conversations with people from

How many people in Asch's study caved in? How many went along with the crowd rather than give what they thought to be the right answer? Seventy-five percent. Three out of four agreed with the majority's wrong answer at least once.

## FICTION

T (F) Seeing is believing.

It is not true that seeing is always believing—especially when the group sees things differently. When we are “all alone,” we may begin to wonder about our own judgment.

### 14-5c FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONFORMITY

Several factors increase the tendency to conform, including belonging to a collectivist rather than an individualistic society (Fukushima et al., 2009), the desire to be liked by other members of the group (but valuing being right more than being liked *decreases* the tendency to conform), low self-esteem, social shyness (Ecker & Buckner, 2014), and lack of familiarity with the task (Phalet & Schoenflug, 2001; Santee & Maslach, 1982). Other factors in conformity include group size and social support. The likelihood of conformity, even to incorrect group judgments, increases rapidly as group size grows to about eight members, more slowly as the group grows to about eight members. At about that point, the maximum chance of conformity is reached. Yet finding just one other person who supports your minority opinion apparently is enough to encourage you to stick to your guns (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Mesoudi, 2009).

### 14-6 AGGRESSION

One could argue that humans are among the most aggressive species on Earth. There are armed conflicts of one kind or another on nearly every continent of the planet. There is murder, and there is battering, often directed at batterers' most intimate partners. There is rape. And we praise “controlled” aggression in football and hockey games. Psychologists ask why we are aggressive.

### 14-6a BIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY, AND AGGRESSION

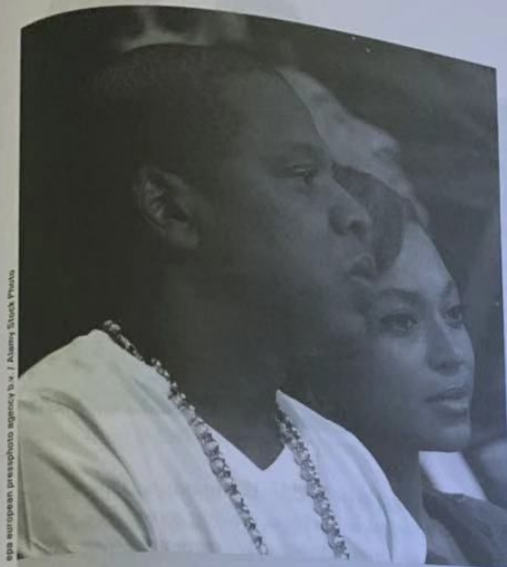
Evolutionary psychologists believe that “genetic whisperings” influence aggression to some degree (Buss, 2009; Confer et al., 2010). Numerous biological structures and chemicals are involved in aggression. In response to certain stimuli, many nonhumans show instinctive aggressive reactions (Archer, 2009). This behavior is automatic. For example, the male robin responds aggressively to the red breast of another robin. The hypothalamus appears to be involved in this inborn reaction pattern. Electrical stimulation of part of the hypothalamus triggers stereotypical aggressive behaviors in many lower animals, including monkeys. However, in humans, whose brains are more complex, other brain structures apparently moderate possible aggressive instincts.

Chemistry is also involved in aggression, especially in the form of the male sex hormone testosterone. Testosterone appears to affect the tendencies to dominate and control other people. Men have higher testosterone levels than women do and are also (usually) more aggressive than women, especially with male strangers (Crofoot & Wrangham, 2010; Pradhan et al., 2010). Aggressive male adolescents and army veterans are likely to have higher testosterone levels than their less aggressive peers (Mazur & Booth, 2014; Popma et al., 2007). James Dabbs and his colleagues (1996) found that members of so-called rambunctious fraternities had higher testosterone levels, on average, than members of more “well-behaved” fraternities. Testosterone levels also vary with the occasion: men's testosterone levels tend to be higher when they are “winning”—whether in athletic competitions such as football or in the stock market (Apicella et al., 2014; Carré & Putnam, 2010).

### 14-6b PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF AGGRESSION

Another reason that males are more likely than females to behave aggressively is that females are more likely to empathize with the victim—to put themselves in the victim's place (Proverbio et al., 2010; Yamasue et al., 2008). Empathy encourages helping behavior, not aggression.

Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychodynamic theory, believed that aggression is a natural and instinctive reaction to the frustrations of daily life. Children (and adults) seek to vent aggressive impulses on other people, including parents, because even the most attentive parents cannot gratify all of their demands immediately.



Presenting examples of admired people from groups who are often stigmatized can reduce feelings of prejudice.

other groups or avoid them? College is meant to be a broadening experience, and we deny ourselves much of the education we could be receiving when we limit our encounters to people who share our own backgrounds.

## 14-7 GROUP BEHAVIOR

To be human is to belong to groups. Groups help us satisfy our needs for affection, attention, and belonging. They empower us to do things we could not manage by ourselves. But groups can also pressure us into doing things we might not do if we were acting alone. This section considers ways in which people behave differently as group members than they would as individuals. We begin with social facilitation.

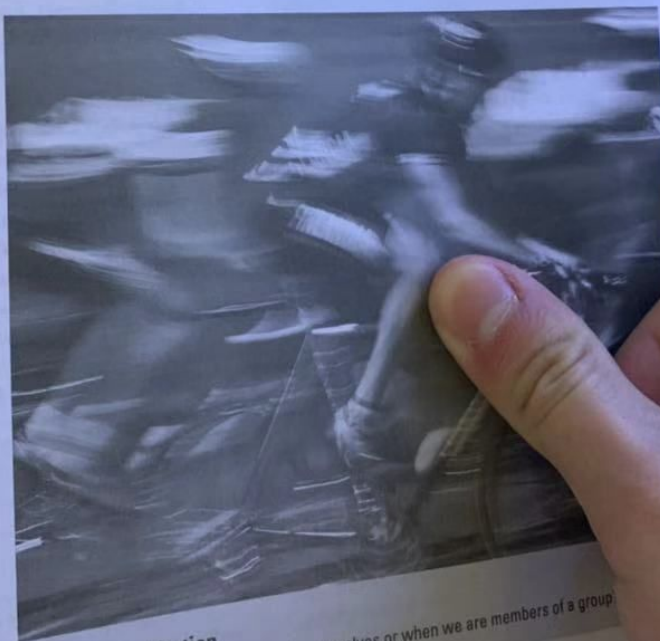
### 14-7a SOCIAL FACILITATION

When you are given a group assignment, do you work harder or less hard than you would alone? Why? One effect of groups on individual behavior is **social facilitation**, the process by which a person's performance is increased when other members of a group engage in similar behavior. Research suggests that the presence of other people increases our levels of arousal, or motivation (Platanis & Moran, 2001; Thomas et al., 2002). At high levels of arousal, our performance of simple tasks is facilitated. Our performance of complex responses may be impaired, however. For this reason, a well-rehearsed speech may be delivered masterfully before a larger audience, while an impromptu speech may be hampered by a large audience.

Social facilitation may be influenced by **evaluation apprehension** as well as arousal—that is, by concern that we are being evaluated (Park & Kitayama, 2014). When giving a speech, we may “lose our thread” if we are distracted by the audience and focus too much on its apparent reaction. If we

**social facilitation** the process by which a person's performance is increased when other members of a group engage in similar behavior

**evaluation apprehension** concern that others are evaluating our behavior



### Social Facilitation

Do we pedal faster when we are by ourselves or when we are members of a group?

CHAPTER 14: Social Psychology

## Social Decision Schemes

How do juries make decisions? What kinds of "social decision schemes" do they use?

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believe that we have begun to flounder, evaluation apprehension may skyrocket. As a result, our performance may falter even more.

The presence of others can also impair performance—not when we are acting *before* a group but when we are anonymous members of a group. Workers, for example, may "goof off" or engage in *social loafing*—that is, failure to make a significant effort because others have made or are making such an effort—they believe they will not be found out and held accountable. Under these group conditions there is no evaluation apprehension, but rather there may be **diffusion of responsibility** in groups. Each person may feel less obligation to help because others are present, especially if the others are perceived as being capable of doing the job (Greitemeyer & Mugge, 2013; Maiden & Perry, 2010). Group members may also reduce their efforts if an apparently capable member makes no contribution but "rides free" on the efforts of others.

### 14-7b GROUP DECISION MAKING

Organizations use groups such as committees or juries to make decisions in the belief that group decisions are more accurate than individual decisions (Van Swol, 2008). Social psychologists have discovered a number of "rules," or **social decision schemes**, that govern much of group decision making (Stasser, 1999). Here are some examples:

**Diffusion of responsibility** the sharing or sharing of responsibility for action or behavior within a group

**Social decision schemes** for predicting the final outcome of group decision making on the basis of the members' initial positions

1. *The majority-wins scheme.* In this commonly used scheme, the group arrives at the decision that

was initially supported by the majority. This scheme appears to guide decision making most often when there is no single objectively correct decision. An example is a decision about which car models to build when their popularity has not been tested in the court of public opinion.

2. *The truth-wins scheme.* In this scheme, as more information is provided and opinions are discussed, the group comes to recognize that one approach is objectively correct. For example, a group deciding whether to use SAT scores in admitting students to college would profit from information about whether the scores predict college success.
3. *The two-thirds majority scheme.* Juries tend to convict defendants when two-thirds of the jury initially favors conviction.
4. *The first-shift rule.* In this scheme, the group tends to adopt the decision that reflects the first shift in opinion expressed by any group member. If a jury is deadlocked, the members may eventually follow the lead of the first juror to switch his or her position.

### 14-7c POLARIZATION AND THE "RISKY SHIFT"

We might assume that a group decision would be more conservative than an individual decision. After all, shouldn't there be an effort to compromise, to "split the difference"? We might also expect that a few mature individuals would be able to balance the opinions of daredevils.

Groups do not always appear to work as we might expect, however. Consider the *polarization* effect. As an individual, you might recommend that your company risk an investment of \$500,000 to develop or market a new product. Other company executives, polled individually,

might risk similar amounts. If you were gathered together to make a group decision, however, you would probably recommend either an amount well above this figure or nothing at all (Viscusi et al., 2011). This group effect is called *polarization*, or the taking of an extreme position. If you had to gamble on which way the decision is, go, however, you would do better to place your money on movement toward the higher sum—that is, to bet on a *risky shift*. Why?

One possibility is that one member of the group may reveal information that the others were not aware of. This information may clearly point in one direction or the other. With doubts removed, the group moves decisively in the appropriate direction. It is also possible that social facilitation occurs in the group setting and that the resulting greater motivation prompts more extreme decisions.

Why, however, do groups tend to take *greater* risks than those their members would take as individuals? One answer is diffusion of responsibility (A. S. Brown, 2007; Viscusi et al., 2011). If the venture flops, the blame will not be placed on you alone.

#### 14-7d GROUPTHINK

**Groupthink**, a concept originated by Irving Janis (1982), is a problem that may arise in group decision making when group members are swayed more by group cohesiveness and a dynamic leader than by the realities of the situation (Esser & Lindoerfer, 2006; Packer, 2009). Group problem solving may degenerate into groupthink when a group senses an external threat (Underhill, 2008). Groupthink is usually fueled by a dynamic group leader. The threat heightens the cohesiveness of the group and is a source of stress. Under stress, group members tend not to consider all their options carefully and frequently make flawed decisions.

Groupthink has been connected with historic fiascos such as the invasion of Iraq, the botched Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the Watergate scandal in which members of the Nixon administration believed they could cover up a theft, and NASA's decision to launch the *Challenger* space shuttle despite engineers' warnings about the dangers created by unusually cold weather (Brownstein, 2003; Esser & Lindoerfer, 2006). Janis and other researchers (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014) note characteristics of groupthink that contribute to flawed decisions:

1. *Feelings of invulnerability.* In the Watergate Affair, the decision-making group might have believed that it was beyond the reach of critics or the law

#### Strength in Numbers? Maybe Not

In their classic experiment, Darley and Latané (1968) had male subjects perform meaningless tasks in cubicles. Then, while they were working, they heard a (convincing) recording of a person apparently having an epileptic seizure. When the men thought that four other persons were immediately available, only 31% tried to help the victim. When they thought that no one else was available, however, 85% of them tried to help.

As in other areas of group behavior, it seems that diffusion of responsibility inhibits helping behavior in groups or crowds. When we are in a group, we are often willing to let George (or Georgette) do it. When George isn't around, we are more willing to help others ourselves.



because they were powerful people who were close to the president of the United States.

2. *The group's belief in its rightness.* Groups of terrorists apparently believe in the rightness of what they are doing. Although they are killing civilians and often committing suicide in the process, terrorists frequently believe that their actions are the only way to draw attention to their cause.
3. *Discrediting information contrary to the group's decision.* Members of terrorist groups often discredit arguments to the effect that their religions do not support the harm of innocent civilians.
4. *Pressures on group members to conform.* Striving for unanimity overrides the quest for realism, and authority can trump expertise. After the disastrous invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, President John F. Kennedy is reported to have said, "How could we have been so stupid?"

**Groupthink** a process in which group members are influenced by cohesiveness and a dynamic leader to ignore external realities as they make decisions

5. **Stereotyping members of the out-group.** In the cases of the invasions of the Bay of Pigs and Iraq, pro-invasion group members stereotyped members of the out-group as being out of touch with reality.

Groupthink can be averted if group leaders encourage members to remain skeptical about options and to feel free to ask probing questions and disagree with one another.

#### 14-7e MOB BEHAVIOR AND DEINDIVIDUATION

Have you ever done something as a member of a group that you would not have done as an individual? What was it? What motivated you? How do you feel about it? The Frenchman Gustave Le Bon (1895–1960) branded mobs and crowds as irrational, resembling a “beast with many heads.” Mob actions, such as race riots and lynchings, sometimes seem to operate on a psychology of their own. Do mobs “bring out the beast in us”?

When people act as individuals, fear of consequences and self-evaluation tend to prevent them from engaging in antisocial behavior. But in a mob, they may experience **deindividuation**, a state in which they are willing to follow a norm that emerges in a specific situation, even if it means ignoring their own values (Lan & Zuo, 2009; Postmes & Spears, 1998). Many factors lead to deindividuation, including anonymity, diffusion of responsibility, arousal due to noise and crowding, and a focus on emerging group norms rather than on one’s own values (S. L. Taylor et al., 2006). Under these circumstances, crowd members behave more aggressively than they would as individuals.

#### 14-7f ALTRUISM AND THE BYSTANDER EFFECT

**Altruism**—selfless concern for the welfare of others—is connected with some heroic behavior. Humans have sacrificed themselves to ensure the survival of their children or of comrades in battle. So how, one might ask, could

the murder of 28-year-old Kitty Genovese have happened? It took place in New York City more than 40 years ago. Murder was not unheard of in the Big Apple, but Kitty had screamed for help as her killer stalked her for more than half an hour and stabbed her in three separate attacks

**Deindividuation** the process by which group members may discontinue self-evaluation and adopt group norms and attitudes

**Altruism** unselfish concern for the welfare of others

**Bystander effect** the tendency to avoid helping other people in emergencies when other people are present and apparently capable of helping

(Manning et al., 2007; Nicksa, 2014). Thirty-eight neighbors heard the commotion. Twice, the assault was interrupted by their voices and bedroom lights. Each time the attacker returned. Yet nobody came to the victim’s aid. No one even called the police.

#### TRUTH

**T F** Nearly 40 people stood by and did nothing while a woman was being stabbed to death.

It is true that nearly 40 people stood by and did nothing while a woman was being stabbed to death.

Why? Some witnesses said matter-of-factly that they did not want to get involved. One said that he was tired. Still others said, “I don’t know.” As a nation, are we a callous bunch who would rather watch than help when others are in trouble? Perhaps nobody came to Kitty’s aid because of the **bystander effect**; that is, they saw that other people were present or, because the murder took place in crowded New York City, they assumed that other people were also available to help.

#### WHEN DO WE HELP SOMEONE WHO IS IN TROUBLE?

Many factors are involved in helping behavior:

1. Observers are more likely to help when they are in a good mood (Schnall et al., 2010). Perhaps good moods impart a sense of personal power—the feeling that we can handle the situation.
2. People who are empathic are more likely to help people in need (Decety & Batson, 2009). Women are more likely than men to be empathic and thus more likely to help people in need (Yamasue et al., 2008).
3. Bystanders may not help unless they believe that an emergency exists (Cocking et al., 2009).
4. Observers must assume the responsibility to act (Nicksa, 2014). A lone person may have been more likely to try to help Kitty Genovese. *Diffusion of responsibility* may inhibit helping behavior in crowds.
5. Observers must know what to do (Baron et al., 2009). Observers who are not sure that they can take charge of the situation may stay on the sidelines for fear of making a social blunder or of getting hurt themselves.
6. Observers are more likely to help people they know (Nicksa, 2014). Evolutionary psychologists suggest

that altruism is selfish from an evolutionary point of view when it helps close relatives or others who are similar to us to survive (Nicksa, 2014). It helps us perpetuate a genetic code similar to our own. This view suggests that we are more likely to be altruistic with our relatives rather than strangers, however.

Observers are more likely to help people who are similar to themselves. Being able to identify with the person in need promotes helping behavior (Nicksa, 2014).

**A NOTE ON THE MOST PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR** Let us not end this chapter and this book on a negative note. Let us think, instead, about the altruism of the firefighters, police officers, and ordinary people who came to the aid of the victims of the suicide terrorism of September 11, 2001. Following the attacks, thousands evacuated lower Manhattan by ferry to New Jersey. Residents of New Jersey drove up and down the streets near the ferry, asking if they could give evacuees rides or help in any other way. And people heading away from the devastation in Manhattan were happy to share their taxicabs, even with strangers. If you know a little about New York City, you know that's rather special—but it's also something done by ordinary people in extraordinary times.

## STUDY TOOLS 14

### READY TO STUDY?

In the book, you can:

- ☐ Rip out the chapter review card at the back of the book for a handy summary of the chapter and key terms.
- ☐ Assess yourself with the Self-Assessment below.
- ☐ Check your understanding of what you've read with the quizzes that follow.

### ONLINE AT CENGAGEBRAIN.COM YOU CAN:

- ☐ Collect StudyBits while you read and study the chapter.
- ☐ Quiz yourself on key concepts.
- ☐ Find videos for further exploration.
- ☐ Prepare for tests with PSYCHS Flash Cards as well as those you create.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

### The Triangular Love Scale

Which are the strongest components of your love relationship? Intimacy? Passion? Commitment? All three components? Two of them?

To complete the following scale, written by Robert Sternberg, fill in the blank spaces with the name of the person you love or care about deeply. Then rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 9-point scale in which 1 = not at all, 5 = moderately, and 9 = extremely. Use points between to indicate intermediate levels of agreement between these values. Then consult the scoring key in Appendix B.

#### INTIMACY COMPONENT

1. I am actively supportive of \_\_\_\_\_'s well-being.
2. I have a warm relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ in times of need.
3. I am able to count on \_\_\_\_\_ in times of need.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is able to count on me in times of need.

5. I am willing to share myself and my possessions with \_\_\_\_\_.
6. I receive considerable emotional support from \_\_\_\_\_.
7. I give considerable emotional support to \_\_\_\_\_.
8. I communicate well with \_\_\_\_\_.

(continued)