Notorious Symbol of Abu Ghraib Scandal Released From Prison

"She was following orders," says sister.

KEYSER, WV, March 25, 2007. Lynndie R. England, the U.S. Army reservist who became one of the most notorious faces of the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal in 2003 after photos of her posing with naked prisoners were leaked to the international media, has been released from a military prison after serving half of her three-year sentence. She is now back home in Mineral County on parole. After pleading guilty in 2005, England was convicted of conspiracy, maltreating Iraqi detainees, and committing an indecent act. When her parole is over, she will receive a dishonorable discharge from the Army.

The photos of Private England, taken at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, shocked the world when they were released. One infamous photo showed her holding a

This photograph of Private Lynndie England keeping an Iraqi prisoner on a leash at Abu Ghraib prison shocked the world.

leash around the neck of a naked detainee; others showed her grinning or giving a thumbs-up over a pile of naked prisoners or pointing to the Iraqis' genitals.

Other soldiers were also involved in the scandal. Photos and videos showed them forcing detainees to simulate fellatio on each other, wear women's underwear on their heads, pile naked on top of one another to form a pyramid, or stand for hours attached to electrodes that the prisoners believed could cause them to be electrocuted at any moment. The photos set off worldwide outrage against the American military and prompted investigations by Congress and the Pentagon.

Throughout her court-martial, England maintained that she posed in the photos only at the direction of her superiors and because she was influenced by an older fellow soldier, Specialist Charles A. Graner, with whom she was having an affair and who later became the father of her child. Graner was sentenced to ten years in prison and was dismissed from the military.

In addition to England and Graner, five other soldiers were charged in the abuses committed at Abu Ghraib prison. All seven soldiers who took part in these incidents defended themselves by saying they were simply following orders. Their families told reporters that the soldiers were kind people who would never voluntarily harm another human being.

"Certain people in the Army told her to do what she did. She was following orders," said Lynndie England's sister, who called England "a kind-hearted, dependable person." Asked if she ever physically abused a detainee, Private England told investigators, "Yes, I stepped on some of them, push them or pull them, but nothing extreme."

Behavior in Social and Cultural Context

Why did the soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison treat the detainees so cruelly? Is Lynndie England a "caring person" who was "simply following orders"? Was she mentally disturbed or cognitively impaired? Was she under the influence of a sadistic boyfriend? Did she and her fellow soldiers behave as they did not because they were unusually brutal or heartless individuals but because of conditions at the prison where they were ordered to work as guards? Were they "bad apples" in an otherwise good barrel, or was the barrel itself rotten? Is the answer to be found in some combination of these explanations?

In 1961, Adolf Eichmann, who had been a high-ranking officer of the Nazi elite, was sentenced to death for his part in the deportation and killing of millions of Jews during World War II. But he insisted that he was not anti-Semitic. Shortly before his execution, Eichmann said, "I am not the monster I am made out to be. I am the victim of a fallacy" (R. Brown, 1986). The fallacy to which Eichmann referred was the widespread belief that a person who does monstrous deeds must be a monster. There does seem to be so much evil and cruelty in the world, and yet so much kindness, sacrifice, and heroism, too. How can we even begin to explain either side of human nature?

The fields of *social psychology* and *cultural psychology* approach this question by examining the powerful influence of the social and cultural environment on the actions of individuals and groups. In this chapter, we will focus on the foundations of social psychology, basic principles that can help us understand why people who are not "crazy" or "monstrous" nonetheless do unspeakably evil things, and, conversely, why some otherwise ordinary people may reach heights of heroism when the occasion demands. We will look at the influence of roles and attitudes, how people's behavior is affected by the groups and situations they are in, and the conditions under which people conform or dissent. Finally, we will consider some of the social and cultural reasons for prejudice and conflict between groups.

YOU are about to learn...

- how social roles and cultural norms regulate behavior without our being aware of it.
- the power of roles and situations to make people behave in ways they never would have predicted for themselves.
- how people can be entrapped into violating their moral principles.

Roles and Rules

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

When people observe that "everyone else" seems to be violating a social norm, they are more likely to do so too—and this is the mechanism by which entire neighborhoods can deteriorate. In six natural field experiments conducted in the Netherlands, researchers found that passersby were more likely to litter, to park illegally, and even to steal a five-euro bill from a mailbox if the sidewalks were dirty and unswept, if graffiti marked the walls, or if strangers were setting off illegal fireworks (Keizer, Linderberg, & Steg, 2008). Conversely, people's behavior will become more constructive if they think that's the norm. When hotels put notices in guest bathrooms that "the majority of guests in this room reuse their towels" (in contrast to simply requesting the guest to do the same because it's good for the environment), more than half agree to participate in the reuse program (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008).

In every society, people also fill a variety of social **roles**, positions that are regulated by norms about how people in those positions should behave.

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

Gender roles define the proper behavior for a man and a woman. Occupational roles determine the correct behavior for a manager and an employee, a professor and a student. Family roles set tasks for parent and child. Certain aspects of every role must be carried out or there will be penalties—emotional, financial, or professional. As a student, for instance, you know just what you have to do to pass your psychology course (or you should by now!). How do you know what a role requirement is? You know when you violate it, intentionally or unintentionally, because you will probably feel awfully uncomfortable, or other people will try to make you feel that way.

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

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

role A given social position that is governed by a set of norms for proper behavior.

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

Get Involved! **Dare To Be Different**

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

Arabs stand much closer in conversation than Westerners do. Most Westerners would feel "crowded" standing so close, even when talking to a close friend. How does it feel when you violate the norm for conversational distance that *your* culture dictates?

For example, cultures differ in their rules for *conversational distance*: how close people normally stand to one another when they are speaking (Hall, 1959, 1976). In general, Arabs like to stand close enough to feel your breath, touch your arm, and see your eyes—a distance that makes most white Americans, Canadians, and northern Europeans uneasy, unless they are talking intimately with a lover. The English and the Swedes stand farthest apart when they converse; southern Europeans stand closer; and Latin Americans and Arabs stand the closest (Keating, 1994; Sommer, 1969).

If you are talking to someone who has different cultural rules for distance from yours, you are likely to feel very uncomfortable without knowing why. You may feel that the person is crowding you or being strangely cool and distant. A student from Lebanon told us how relieved he was to understand how cultures differ in their rules for conversational distance. "When Anglo students moved away from me, I thought they were prejudiced," he said. "Now I see why I was more comfortable talking with Latino students. They like to stand close, too."

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

The Obedience Study

In the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974) designed a study that would become world-famous. Milgram wanted to know how many people would obey an authority figure when directly ordered to violate their ethical standards. Participants in the study thought they were part of an experiment on the effects of punishment on learning. Each was assigned, apparently at random, to the role of "teacher." Another person, introduced as a fellow volunteer, was the "learner." Whenever the learner, seated in an adjoining room, made an error in reciting a list of word pairs he was supposed to have memorized, the teacher had to give him an electric shock by depressing a lever on a machine (see Figure 10.1). With each error, the voltage (marked from 0 to 450) was to be increased by another 15 volts. The shock levels on the machine were labeled from SLIGHT SHOCK to DANGER—SEVERE SHOCK and, finally, ominously, XXX. In reality, the learners were confederates of Milgram and did not receive any shocks, but none of the teachers ever realized this during the study. The actor-victims played their parts convincingly: As the study

FIGURE 10.1
The Milgram Obedience Experiment
On the left is Milgram's original shock machine; in 1963, it looked pretty ominous. On the right, the "learner" is being strapped into his chair by the experimenter and the "teacher."

(left) Archives of the History of American Psychology–
The University of Akron (right) Copyright 1965 by Stanley Milgram. From the film OBEDIENCE, distributed by Penn State Media Sales.

continued, they shouted in pain and pleaded to be released, all according to a prearranged script.

Before doing this study, Milgram asked a number of psychiatrists, students, and middle-class adults how many people they thought would "go all the way" to XXX on orders from the researcher. The psychiatrists predicted that most people would refuse to go beyond 150 volts, when the learner first demanded to be freed, and that only one person in a thousand, someone who was disturbed and sadistic, would administer the highest voltage. The nonprofessionals agreed with this prediction, and all of them said that they personally would disobey early in the procedure.

That is not, however, the way the results turned out. Every single person administered some shock to the learner, and about two-thirds of the participants, of all ages and from all walks of life, obeyed to the fullest extent. Many protested to the experimenter, but they backed down when he calmly asserted, "The experiment requires that you continue." They obeyed no matter how much the victim shouted for them to stop and no matter how painful the shocks seemed to be. They obeyed even when they themselves were anguished about the pain they believed they were causing. As Milgram (1974) noted, participants would "sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh"—but still they obeyed.

Over the decades, more than 3,000 people of many different ethnicities have gone through replications of the Milgram study. Most of them, men and women equally, inflicted what they thought were dangerous amounts of shock to another person. Researchers in other countries have also found high percentages of obedience, ranging to more than 90 percent in Spain and the Netherlands (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995; Smith & Bond, 1994).

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

- *When the experimenter left the room*, many people subverted authority by giving low levels of shock but reporting that they had followed orders.

- *When the victim was right there in the room*, and the teacher had to administer the shock directly to the victim's body, many people refused to go on.

- *When two experimenters issued conflicting demands*, with one telling participants to continue and another saying to stop at once, no one kept inflicting shock.

- *When the person ordering them to continue was an ordinary man*, apparently another volunteer instead of the authoritative experimenter, many participants disobeyed.

- *When the participant worked with peers who refused to go further*, he or she often gained the courage to disobey.

Obedience, Milgram concluded, was more a function of the *situation* than of the personalities of the participants. "The key to [their] behavior," Milgram (1974) summarized, "lies not in pent-up anger or aggression but in the nature of their relationship to authority. They have given themselves to the authority; they see themselves as instruments for the execution of his wishes; once so defined, they are unable to break free." ◉ Watch

The Milgram study has had numerous critics. Some consider it unethical because people were kept in the dark about what was really happening until the session was over (of course, telling them in advance would have invalidated the study) and because many suffered emotional pain (Milgram countered that they would not have felt pain if they had simply disobeyed instructions). The original study could never be repeated in the U.S. today because of these ethical concerns. However, a "softer" version of the experiment has been done, in which "teachers" were asked to administer shocks only up to 150 volts, when they first heard the learner protest. That amount of shock was a critical choice point in Milgram's study: Nearly 80 percent of those who went past 150 ended up going all the way to the end (Packer, 2008).

In the replication, the experimenter rejected anyone who already knew about the original Milgram study and anyone a clinician judged to be emotionally vulnerable. Even so, he found that obedience rates were only slightly lower than Milgram's. Once again, gender, education, age, and ethnicity had no effect on the likelihood of obeying (Burger, 2009). In another, rather eerie cyberversion replication of Milgram's study, participants had to shock a virtual woman on a computer screen. Even though they knew she wasn't real, their heart rates increased and they

◉ **Watch** the **Video** **Milgram** **Obedience** **Study Today** on **mypsychlab.com**

In Milgram's study, when the "teacher" had to administer shock directly to the learner, most subjects refused, but this one continued to obey.

reported feeling bad about delivering the "shocks." Yet they kept doing it (Slater et al., 2006). And in 2010 in France, 80 participants in "The Game of Death," a fake game show modeled on the Milgram experiment, were instructed to deliver increasingly powerful shocks to a man until he appeared to die. All but 16 of the players gave the maximum jolt.

Some psychologists have questioned Milgram's conclusion that personality traits are virtually irrelevant to whether or not people obey an authority. Certain traits, they note, especially hostility, narcissism, and rigidity, do increase obedience and a willingness to inflict pain on others (Blass, 2000; Twenge, 2009). Others have objected to the parallel Milgram drew between the behavior of the study's participants and the brutality of the Nazis and others who have committed acts of barbarism in the name of duty (Darley, 1995). The people in Milgram's study typically obeyed only when the experimenter was hovering right there, and many of them felt enormous discomfort and conflict. In contrast, most Nazis acted without direct supervision by authorities, without external pressure, and without feelings of anguish.

Nevertheless, no one disputes that Milgram's compelling study has had a tremendous influence on public awareness of the dangers of uncritical obedience. As John Darley (1995) observed, "Milgram shows us the beginning of a path by means of which ordinary people, in the grip of social forces, become the origins of atrocities in the real world."

The Prison Study

Another famous demonstration of the power of roles is known as the Stanford prison study. Its designers, Philip Zimbardo and Craig Haney, wanted to know what would happen if ordinary college students were randomly assigned to the roles of prisoners and guards (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). And so they set up a serious-looking "prison" in the basement of a Stanford building, complete with individual cells, different uniforms for prisoners and guards, and nightsticks for the guards. The students agreed to live there for two weeks.

Within a short time, most of the prisoners became distressed and helpless. They developed emotional symptoms and physical ailments. Some became apathetic; others became rebellious. One panicked and broke down. The guards, however, began to enjoy their new power. Some tried to be nice, helping the prisoners and doing little favors for them. Some were "tough but fair," holding

Prisoners and guards quickly learn their respective roles, which often have more influence on their behavior than their personalities do.

strictly to "the rules." But about a third became punitive and harsh, even when the prisoners were not resisting in any way. One guard became unusually sadistic, smacking his nightstick into his palm as he vowed to "get" the prisoners and instructing two of them to simulate sexual acts (they refused). The researchers, who had not expected such a speedy and alarming transformation of ordinary students, ended this study after only six days.

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

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

These are pretty powerful suggestions to the guards about how they would be permitted to behave, and they convey Zimbardo's personal encouragement ("*we'll* have all the power"), so perhaps it is not surprising that some took Zimbardo at his word and behaved quite brutally. The one sadistic guard later said he was just trying to play the role of the "worst S.O.B. guard" he'd seen in the movies. Even the investigators themselves noted at the time that the data were "subject to possible errors due to selective sampling. The video and audio recordings tended to be focussed upon the more interesting, dramatic events which occurred" (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

Despite these flaws, the Stanford prison study remains a useful cautionary tale. In real prisons, guards do have the kind of power that was given to these students, and they too may be given instructions that encourage them to treat prisoners harshly. Thus the prison study provides a good example of how the social situation affects behavior, causing some people to behave in ways that seem out of character. ◉—**Watch**

Why People Obey

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

Most people follow orders because of the obvious consequences of disobedience: They can be suspended from school, fired from their jobs, or arrested. But they may also obey because they hope to gain advantages or promotions from the authority, or because they expect to learn from the authority's greater knowledge or experience. They obey because they respect the authority's legitimacy. And most of all, they obey because they do not want to rock the boat, appear to doubt the experts, or be rude, fearing that they will be disliked or rejected for doing so (Collins & Brief, 1995).

But what about all those obedient people in Milgram's study who felt they were doing wrong and who wished they were free, but who could not untangle themselves from the "cobweb of social constraints"? How do people become morally disengaged from the consequences of their actions?

One answer is **entrapment**, a process in which individuals escalate their commitment to a course of action in order to justify their investment in it (Brockner & Rubin, 1985). The first stages of entrapment pose no difficult choices. But as people take a step, or make a decision to continue, they will justify that action, which makes them feel that it is the right one and that they haven't done anything foolish or unethical (Tavris & Aronson, 2007). Each step thus leads to another. Before long, the person has become committed to a course of action that is increasingly self-defeating, cruel, or foolhardy. Thus, in Milgram's study, once participants had given a 15-volt shock, they committed themselves to the experiment. The next level was "only" 30 volts. Because each increment was small, before they knew it most people were administering what they believed were dangerously strong shocks. At that point, it was difficult to justify and explain a sudden decision to quit, especially after reaching 150 volts, the point at which the "learner" made his first verbal protests.

Whichever decision a person makes, to obey an authority or protest, he or she will feel an urgency to justify the choice made (Tavris & Aronson, 2007). Those who obey frequently justify their behavior by handing over responsibility to the

Slot machines rely on the principle of entrapment, which is why casinos make millions and most players don't. A person vows to spend only a few dollars but, after losing them, says, "Well, maybe another couple of tries" or "I've spent so much, now I really have to win something to get back what I've lost."

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

authority, thereby absolving themselves of accountability for their own actions (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). In Milgram's study, many who administered the highest levels of shock adopted the attitude "It's his problem; I'm just following orders." In contrast, individuals who refused to give high levels of shock took responsibility for their actions. "One of the things I think is very cowardly," said a 32-year-old engineer, "is to try to shove the responsibility onto someone else. See, if I now turned around and said, 'It's your fault . . . it's not mine,' I would call that cowardly" (Milgram, 1974).

A chilling study of entrapment was conducted with 25 men who had served in the Greek military police during the authoritarian regime that ended in 1974 (Haritos-Fatouros, 1988). A psychologist interviewed the men, identifying the steps used in training them to torture prisoners in the hope of gaining information. First, the men were ordered to stand guard outside the interrogation and torture cells. Then they stood guard inside the detention rooms, where they observed the torture of prisoners. Then they "helped" beat up prisoners. Once they had obediently followed these orders and became actively involved, the torturers found their actions easier to carry out. Similar procedures have been used to train military and police interrogators to torture political opponents and criminal suspects.

Investigative journalists and social scientists have documented the use of torture all over the world, although torture is expressly forbidden under international law (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, & Zimbardo, 2003). In Chicago in the 1980s, at the height of black-white community tensions, an investigation following the torture of a black man arrested for murder led to the exposure of at least 62 other cases in which police detectives had severely beaten, burned, or applied electric shock to black suspects or criminals for information or revenge. In England during the conflict between the British and Northern Ireland, British officers took Irish prisoners suspected of being terrorists and put them in hoods, dehydrated them, and beat them nearly to death (Conroy, 2000). And, as noted in our opening story, members of the American military tortured Arab detainees held in "extraordinary rendition" centers and Abu Ghraib prison (Mayer, 2009).

From their standpoint, torturers justify their actions because they see themselves as good guys who are just doing their jobs, especially in wartime. And perhaps they are, but such a justification overlooks entrapment. This prisoner might be a terrorist, but what if this other one is completely innocent? Before long, the torturer has shifted his reasoning from "If this person is guilty, he deserves to be tortured" to "If I am torturing this person, he must be guilty." And so the abuse escalates (Tavris & Aronson, 2007).

This is a difficult concept for people who divide the world into "good guys" versus "bad guys" and cannot imagine that good guys might do brutal things; if the good guys are doing it, by definition it's all right to do. Yet in everyday life, as in the Milgram study, people often set out on a path that is morally ambiguous, only to find that they have traveled a long way toward violating their own principles. From Greece's torturers to members of the American military, from Milgram's well-meaning volunteers to all of us in our everyday lives, people face the difficult task of drawing a line beyond which they will not go. For many, the demands of the role and the social pressures of the situation defeat the inner voice of conscience.

Quick Quiz

Step into your role of student to answer these questions.

1. About what proportion of the people in Milgram's obedience study administered the highest level of shock? (a) two-thirds, (b) one-half, (c) one-third, (d) one-tenth

2. Which of the following actions by the "learner" reduced the likelihood of being shocked by the "teacher" in Milgram's study? (a) protesting noisily, (b) screaming in pain, (c) complaining of having a heart ailment, (d) nothing he did made a difference

3. A friend of yours, who is moving, asks you to bring over a few boxes. As long as you are there anyway, he asks you to fill them with books. Before you know it, you have packed up his kitchen, living room, and bedroom. What social-psychological process is at work here?

Answers:

1. a 2. d 3. entrapment

YOU are about to learn...

- two general ways that people explain their own or other people's behavior—and why it matters.
- three self-serving biases in how people think about themselves and the world.
- why most people will believe outright lies and nonsensical statements if they are repeated often enough.
- whether certain fundamental political and religious attitudes have a genetic component.

Social Influences on Beliefs and Behavior

Explore **Fundamental Attribution Error** on **mypsychlab.com**

Explore Social Psychology: How Others Affect Us on **mypsychlab.com**

Social psychologists are interested not only in what people do in social situations, but also in what is going on in their heads while they are doing it. Researchers in the area of **social cognition** examine how people's perceptions of themselves and others affect their relationships and also how the social environment influences their perceptions, beliefs, and values. Current approaches draw on evolutionary theory, neuroimaging studies, surveys, and experiments to identify universal themes in how human beings perceive and feel about one another. In this section, we will consider two important topics in social cognition: attributions and attitudes. **Explore**

Attributions

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

attribution theory The theory that people are motivated to explain their own and other people's behavior by attributing causes of that behavior to a situation or a disposition.
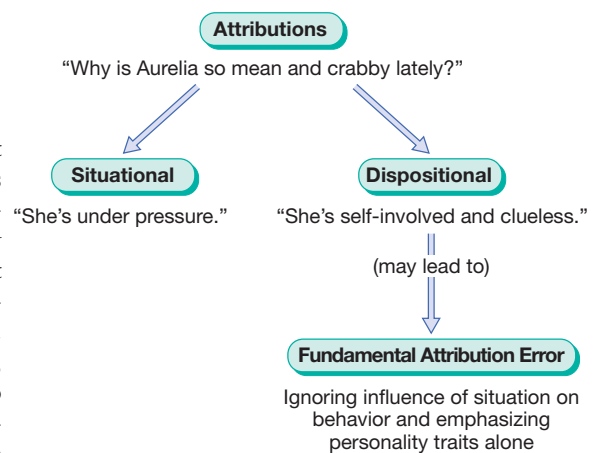
fundamental attribution error The tendency, in explaining other people's behavior, to overestimate personality factors and underestimate the influence of the situation.

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

When people are trying to explain someone else's behavior, they tend to overestimate personality traits and underestimate the influence of the situation (Forgas, 1998; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). In terms of attribution theory, they tend to ignore situational attributions in favor of dispositional ones. This tendency has been called the **fundamental attribution**

error (Jones, 1990). Were the hundreds of people who obeyed Milgram's experimenters sadistic by nature? Were the student guards in the prison study cruel and the prisoners cowardly by temperament? Were the individuals who pocketed the money from a mailbox on a dirty street "born thieves"? Those who think so are committing the fundamental attribution error. The impulse to explain other people's behavior in terms of their personalities is so strong that we do it even when we know that the other person was *required* to behave in a certain way (Yzerbyt et al., 2001). **Explore**

The fundamental attribution error is especially prevalent in Western nations, where middle-class people tend to believe that individuals are responsible for their own actions and dislike the idea that the situation has much influence over them. They think that *they* would have refused the experimenter's cruel orders and *they* would have treated fellow-students-temporarily-called-prisoners fairly. In contrast, in countries such as India, where everyone is embedded in caste and family networks, and in Japan, China, Korea, and Hong Kong, where people are more group oriented than in the West, people are more likely to be aware of situational constraints on behavior, including their own behavior (Balcetis, Dunning, & Miller, 2008; Choi et al., 2003). Thus, if someone is behaving oddly, makes a mistake, or commits an ethical lapse, a person from India or China, unlike a Westerner, is more likely to make a situational attribution of the person's behavior ("He's under pressure") than a dispositional one ("He's incompetent").

A primary reason for the fundamental attribution error is that people rely on different sources of information to judge their own behavior and that of others. We know what we ourselves are thinking

and feeling, but we can't always know the same of others. Thus, we assess our own actions by introspecting about our feelings and intentions, but when we observe the actions of others, we have only their behavior to guide our interpretations (Pronin, 2008; Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). This basic asymmetry in social perception is further widened by self-serving biases, habits of thinking that make us feel good about ourselves, even (perhaps especially) when we shouldn't. We discuss other cognitive biases in Chapter 7, but here are three that are especially relevant to the attributions (and misattributions) that people often make:

1 **The bias to choose the most flattering and forgiving attributions of our own lapses**. When it comes to explaining their own behavior, people tend to choose attributions that are favorable to them, taking credit for their good actions (a dispositional attribution) but letting the situation account for their failures, embarrassing mistakes, or harmful actions (Mezulis et al., 2004). For instance, most North Americans, when angry, will say, "I am furious for good reason; this situation is intolerable." They are less likely to say, "I am furious because I am an ill-tempered grinch." On the other hand, if they do something admirable, such as donating to charity, they are likely to attribute their motives to a personal disposition ("I'm so generous") instead of the situation ("That guy on the phone pressured me into it").

2 **The bias that we are better, smarter, and kinder than others**. This bias has been called the "holier-than-thou" effect: the tendency of most people to be overly optimistic about their own abilities, competence, and good qualities such as generosity and compassion (Balcetis, Dunning, & Miller, 2008; Dunning et al., 2003). They overestimate their willingness to "do the right thing" in a moral dilemma, give to a charity, cooperate with a stranger in trouble, and so on. But when they are actually in a situation that calls for generosity, compassion, or ethical action, they often fail to live up to their own self-image because the demands of the situation have a stronger influence. The holier-than-thou effect is actually greatest among people who *literally* strive to be "holier than thou" and "humbler than thee" (Rowatt et al., 2002). In two studies conducted at fundamentalist Christian colleges, the greater the students' intrinsic religiousness and fundamentalism, the greater was their tendency to rate themselves as being more adherent to biblical commandments than other people—and more humble than other people, too!

"When I was making money, I made the most money, and now that I'm spiritual I'm the most spiritual."

3 **The bias to believe that the world is fair.** According to the **just-world hypothesis**, attributions are also affected by the need to believe that justice usually prevails, that good people are rewarded and bad guys punished (Lerner, 1980). When this belief is thrown into doubt—especially when bad things happen to "good people" who are just like us—we are motivated to restore it (Aguiar et al., 2008). Unfortunately, one common way of restoring the belief in a just world is to call upon a dispositional attribution called *blaming the victim:* Maybe that person wasn't so good after all; he or she must have done something to deserve what happened or to provoke it. Blaming the victim is virtually universal when people are ordered to harm others or find themselves entrapped into harming others (Bandura, 1999). In the Milgram study, some "teachers" made comments such as, "[The learner] was so stupid and stubborn he deserved to get shocked" (Milgram, 1974).

It may be good for our self-esteem to feel that we are kinder, more competent, and more moral than other people, and that we are not influenced by external circumstances (except when they excuse our mistakes). But these flattering delusions can distort communication, impede the resolution of conflicts, and lead to serious misunderstandings.

Of course, sometimes dispositional (personality) attributions do explain a person's behavior. The point to remember is that the attributions you make can have huge consequences. Happy couples usually attribute their partners' occasional lapses to

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

something in the situation ("Poor guy is under a lot of stress") and their partners' loving actions to something about them ("He has the sweetest nature"). But unhappy couples do just the reverse. They attribute lapses to their partners' personalities ("He is totally selfish") and good behavior to the situation ("Yeah, he gave me a present, but only because his mother told him to") (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). You can see why the attributions you make about your partner, your parents, and your friends will affect how you get along with them— and how long you will put up with their failings.

Quick Quiz

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

1. What kind of attribution is being made in each case, situational or dispositional? (a) A man says, "My wife has sure become a grouchy person." (b) The same man says, "I'm grouchy because I had a bad day at the office." (c) A woman reads about high unemployment in poor communities and says, "Well, if those people weren't so lazy, they would find work."

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

Answers:

1. **a.** dispositional **b.** situational **c.** dispositional 2. Item *a* illustrates the fundamental attribution error; *b*, the bias to choose a flattering or forgiving explanation of our own lapses; and *c*, blaming the victim, possibly because of the just-world hypothesis.

Attitudes

People hold attitudes about all sorts of things—politics, food, children, movies, sports heroes, you name it. An *attitude* is a belief about people, groups, ideas, or activities. Some attitudes are *explicit*: We are aware of them, they shape our conscious decisions and actions, and they can be measured on self-report questionnaires. Others are *implicit*: We are unaware of them, they may influence our behavior in ways we do not recognize, and they are measured in indirect ways (Stanley, Phelps, & Banaji, 2008).

Some of your attitudes change when you have new experiences, and on occasion they change because you rationally decide you were wrong about something. But attitudes also change because of the psychological need for consistency and the mind's normal biases in processing information. In Chapter 7, we discuss **cognitive dissonance**, the uncomfortable feeling that occurs when two attitudes, or an attitude and behavior, are in conflict (are dissonant). To resolve this dissonance, most people will change one of their attitudes. Thus, if a politician or celebrity you admire does something stupid, immoral, or illegal, you can restore consistency either by lowering your opinion of the person or by deciding that the person's behavior wasn't so stupid or immoral after all. Usually, and unfortunately for critical thinking, people restore cognitive consistency by dismissing evidence that might otherwise throw their fundamental beliefs into question (Aronson, 2008).

Shifting Opinions and Bedrock Beliefs

All around you, every day, advertisers, politicians, and friends are trying to influence your attitudes. One weapon they use is the drip, drip, drip of a repeated idea. Repeated exposure even to a nonsense syllable such as *zug* is enough to make a person feel more positive toward it (Zajonc, 1968). The

cognitive dissonance
A state of tension that occurs when a person simultaneously holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent or when a person's belief is incongruent with his or her behavior.
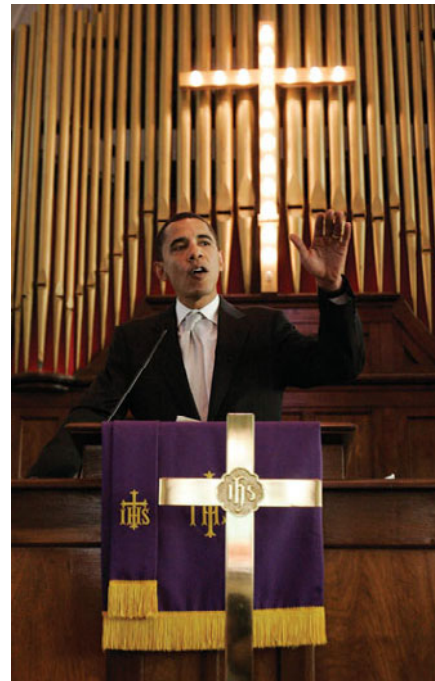
In spite of Barack Obama's lifelong affiliation as a Christian, some of his opponents spread the big lie that he is a Muslim. After this lie was repeated countless times on the Internet, many people fell for it.

familiarity effect, the tendency to hold positive attitudes toward familiar people or things, has been demonstrated across cultures, across species, and across states of awareness, from alert to preoccupied. It works even for stimuli you aren't aware of seeing (Monahan, Murphy, & Zajonc, 2000). A related phenomenon is the **validity effect**, the tendency to believe that something is true simply because it has been repeated many times. Repeat something often enough, even the basest lie, and eventually the public will believe it. Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, called this technique the "Big Lie."

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

On most everyday topics, such as movies, sports, and the boiling point of mercury, people's attitudes range from casual to committed. If your best friend is neutral about baseball whereas you are an insanely devoted fan, your friendship will probably survive. But when the subject is one involving beliefs that give meaning and purpose to a person's life—most notably, politics and religion—it's another ball game, so to speak. Wars have been fought, and are being fought as you read this, over people's most passionate convictions. Perhaps the attitude that causes the most controversy and bitterness around the world is the one toward religious diversity: accepting or intolerant. Some people of all religions accept a world of differing religious views and practices; they believe that church and state should be separate. But for many fundamentalists (in any religion), religion and politics are inseparable; they believe that one religion should prevail (Jost et al., 2003). You can see, then, why these irreconcilable attitudes cause continuing conflict, and

When people hold attitudes that are central to their religious and political philosophies, they often fail to realize that the other side feels just as strongly.

sometimes are used to justify terrorism and war. Why are people so different in these views?

Do Genes Influence Attitudes?   Do you support or disapprove of the death penalty, bans on assault weapons, tolerant immigration policies? Are you worried about global warming or do you think its dangers have been exaggerated? Do you prefer Rush Limbaugh or Jon Stewart? Where did your attitudes on these issues and people come from?

Many attitudes result from learning and experience, of course. But research from behavioral genetics has found that some core attitudes stem from personality traits that are heritable. That is, the variation among people in these attitudes is due in part to their genetic differences (see Chapter 2). Two such traits are "openness to experience" and "conscientiousness." We would expect people who are open to new experiences to hold positive attitudes toward novelty and change in general. We would expect people who prefer the familiar and conventional, and who are conscientious about order and obligations, to be drawn to conservative politics and religious denominations.

And that is what research finds. In one study of Protestant groups, fundamentalist Christians scored much lower than liberal Christians on the dimension of openness to experience (Streyffeler & McNally, 1998). Conversely, conservatives score

familiarity effect The tendency of people to feel more positive toward a person, item, product, or other stimulus the more familiar they are with it.

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

higher than liberals on conscientiousness (Jost, 2006). These personality traits underlie a host of specific attitudes. A study at the University of Texas found that liberal students were more likely than conservatives to have favorable attitudes toward atheists, poetry, Asian food, jazz, street people, tattoos, foreign films, erotica, big cities, recreational drugs, and foreign travel—all examples of "openness to experience" rather than preference for the familiar (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008).

Religious *affiliation*—whether a person is a Methodist, Muslim, Catholic, Jew, Hindu, and so on—is not heritable. Most people choose a religious group because of their parents, ethnicity, culture, and social class, and many Americans switch their religious affiliation at least once in their lives. But *religiosity*—a person's depth of religious feeling and adherence to a religion's rules—does have a genetic component. When religiosity combines with conservatism and authoritarianism (an unquestioning trust in authority), the result is a deeply ingrained acceptance of tradition and dislike of those who question it (Olson et al., 2001; Saucier, 2000).

Likewise, political affiliation is not heritable; it is largely related to your upbringing and to the friends you make in early adulthood, the key years for deciding which party you want to join. But political conservatism has high heritability: .65 in men and .45 in women (Bouchard, 2004). Various political positions on emotionally hot topics that are associated with conservative or liberal views are also

partly heritable. A team of researchers investigated this possibility by drawing on two large samples of more than 8,000 sets of twins who had been surveyed about their personality traits, religious beliefs, and political attitudes (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005). The researchers compared the opinions of fraternal twins (who share, on average, 50 percent of their genes) with those of identical twins (who share 100 percent of their genes). They calculated how often the identical twins agreed on each issue, subtracted the rate at which fraternal twins agreed, and ended up with a rough measure of heritability.

As you can see in Figure 10.2, the attitudes showing the highest heritability were those toward school prayer and property taxes; attitudes showing the lowest influence of genes included those toward nuclear power, divorce, modern art, and abortion.

As a result of such evidence, some psychological scientists maintain that ideological belief systems may have evolved in human societies to be organized along a left-right dimension, consisting of two core sets of attitudes: (1) whether a person advocates social change or supports the system as it is, and (2) whether a person thinks inequality is a result of human policies and can be overcome, or is inevitable and should be accepted as part of the natural order (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Liberals tend to prefer the values of progress, rebelliousness, chaos, flexibility, feminism, and equality, whereas conservatives tend to prefer tradition, conformity, order, stability, traditional values, and hierarchy.
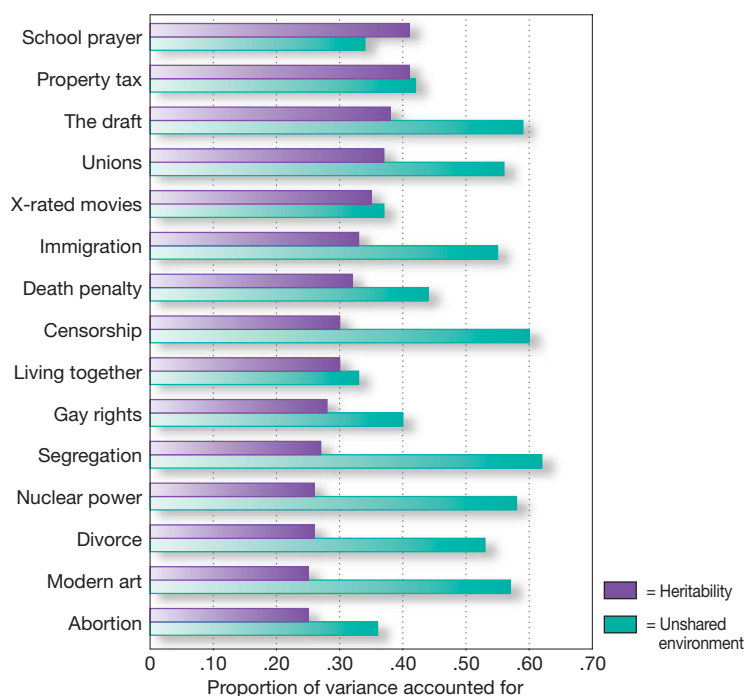

FIGURE 10.2
The Genetics of Belief
A study of thousands of identical and fraternal twins identified the approximate genetic contribution to the variation in attitudes about diverse topics. Heritability was greatest for school prayer and property tax, and lowest for divorce, modern art, and abortion. But notice that, in almost all cases, a person's unique life experiences (the non-shared environment) were far more influential than genes, especially on attitudes toward topics as unrelated as the draft, censorship, and segregation (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005).

Evolutionary psychologists point out that both sets of attitudes would have had adaptive benefits over the centuries: Conservatism would have promoted stability, tradition, and order, whereas liberalism would have promoted flexibility and change (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009).

These findings are provocative, but it is important not to oversimplify them—say, by incorrectly assuming that everyone's political opinions are hard-wired and unaffected by events. In fact, the factor that accounts for even more of the variation in political attitudes than heritability is individual life experiences, or what behavioral geneticists call the *nonshared environment* (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005; see Chapter 2). What experiences have you had, because of your family, gender, ethnicity, social class, or unique history, that have shaped your own political views?

| Thinking Critically about the Genetics of Belief |

Persuasion or "Brainwashing"? The Case of Suicide Bombers

Let's now see how the social-psychological factors discussed thus far might help explain the tragic and disturbing phenomenon of suicide bombers. In many countries, young men and women have wired themselves with explosives and blown up soldiers, civilians, and children, sacrificing their own lives in the process. Although people on two sides of a war dispute the definition of terrorism—one side's "terrorist" is the other side's "freedom fighter"—most social scientists define *terrorism* as politically motivated violence specifically designed to instill feelings of terror and helplessness in a population (Moghaddam, 2005). Are these perpetrators mentally ill? Have they been "brainwashed"?

A researcher who surveyed all known female suicide attacks throughout the world since 1981 (including Afghanistan, Israel, Iraq, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey) found that "the main motives and circumstances that drive female suicide attackers are quite similar to those that drive men"—loyalty to their country or religion, anger at being occupied by a foreign military, and revenge for loved ones killed by the enemy (O'Rourke, 2008). But most of their peers might feel just as patriotic and angry, without being moved to blow up random passersby and babies. Why does a small minority go that far?

"Brainwashing" implies that a person has had a sudden change of mind without being aware of what is happening; it sounds mysterious and strange. On the contrary, studies of terrorist cells have found that the methods used to create a terrorist suicide bomber are neither mysterious nor unusual (Bloom, 2005; Moghaddam, 2005). Some people may be more emotionally vulnerable than others to these methods, but most of the people who become terrorists are not easily distinguishable from the general population. Indeed, research on contemporary suicide bombers in the Middle East—including Mohamed Atta, who led the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center—shows that they usually have no psychopathology and are often quite educated and affluent (Krueger, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Silke, 2003). And far from being seen as crazy loners, most suicide bombers are celebrated and honored by their families and communities for their "martyrdom" (Bloom, 2005). The methods of indoctrination include these elements:

- *The person is subjected to entrapment.* Just as ordinary people do not become torturers overnight, they do not become terrorists overnight either; the process proceeds step by step. At first, the new recruit to the cause agrees only to do small things, but gradually the demands increase to spend more time, more money, more sacrifice. Like other revolutionaries, people who become suicide bombers are idealistic and angry about injustices, real and perceived. But some ultimately take extreme measures because, over time, they have become entrapped in closed groups led by strong or charismatic leaders (Moghaddam, 2005).

- *The person's problems, personal and political, are explained by one simple attribution*, which is repeatedly emphasized: "It's all the fault of those bad people; we have to eliminate them."

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

The group fans the "emotional fuel" that feeds suicide bombers' motivation: their grievances, their perceived humiliation at the hands of those "bad people," their feelings of impotence and meaninglessness (Kruglanski et al., 2009).

- *The person is offered a new identity and is promised salvation.* The recruit is told that he or she is part of the chosen, the elite, or the saved. In 1095, Pope Urban II launched a holy war against Muslims, assuring his forces that killing a Muslim was an act of Christian penance. Anyone killed in battle, the Pope promised, would bypass thousands of years of torture in purgatory and go directly to heaven. This is what young Muslim terrorists are promised today for killing Western "infidels."

- *The person's access to disconfirming (dissonant) information is severely controlled.* As soon as a person is a committed believer, the leader limits the person's choices, denigrates critical thinking, and suppresses private doubts. Recruits may be physically isolated from the outside world and thus from antidotes to the leader's ideas. They are separated from their families, are indoctrinated and trained for 18 months or more, and eventually become emotionally bonded to the group and the leader (Atran, 2003).

These methods are similar to those that have been used to entice Americans into religious and other sects (Ofshe & Watters, 1994; Singer, 2003). In the 1970s, the cult leader Jim Jones told members of his "People's Temple" that the time had come to die, and 913 people dutifully lined up to drink Kool-Aid mixed with cyanide; many gave it to their children. In the 1990s, David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas, led his followers to a fiery death in a shootout with the FBI. In these groups, as in the case of terrorist cells, most recruits started out as ordinary people. Yet, after being subjected to the influence techniques we have described, they ended up doing things that they once would have found unimaginable.

✓ **Study** and **Review** on **mypsychlab.com**

Quick Quiz

Now, how can we persuade you to take this quiz without brainwashing you?

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

2. Which of the following has a significant heritable component? (a) religious affiliation, (b) political affiliation, (c) attitudes that favor stability and order versus those favoring equality and change, (d) attitudes toward modern art, (e) political conservatism

3. A friend urges you to join a "life-renewal" group called "The Feeling Life." Your friend has been spending increasing amounts of time with her fellow Feelies, and has already contributed more than $2,000 to their cause. You have some doubts about them. What questions would you want to have answered before joining up?

Answers:

1. The familiarity effect and the validity effect 2. c, e 3. A few things to consider: Is there an autocratic leader who suppresses dissent and criticism, while rationalizing this practice as a benefit for members—for example, by saying to potential skeptics, "Doubt and disbelief are signs that your feeling side is being repressed"? Have long-standing members given up their friends, families, interests, and ambitions for this group? Does the leader offer simple but unrealistic promises to repair your life and all your troubles? Are members required to make sacrifices by donating large amounts of time and money?

◆ **YOU** are about to learn…

- why people in groups often go along with the majority even when the majority is dead wrong.

- how "groupthink" can lead to bad decisions.

- how crowds can create "bystander apathy" and unpredictable violence.

- the conditions that increase the likelihood that some people will dissent, take risks to help others, or blow the whistle on wrongdoers.

Individuals in Groups

The need to belong may be the most powerful of all human motivations (Baumeister et al., 2007). Human beings are so powerfully connected to one another, and so dependent upon human companionship, that most people feel and remember the *social* pain of being rejected, humiliated, or excluded more intensely than actual *physical* pain they have endured (Chen et al., 2008; Williams, 2009). The need for social connection also explains why sending a prisoner to solitary confinement is internationally considered a form of torture: Its psychological consequences are even more devastating than physical abuse (Gawande, 2009).

Accordingly, the most powerful weapon that groups have to ensure their members' cooperation, and to weed out unproductive or disruptive members, is ostracism—rejection or permanent banishment. Social rejection impedes the ability to empathize, think critically, and solve problems. It can lead to mental disorders, eating disorders, and attempted suicide. No wonder that when people are rejected by a group they care about, some try to mend the rift, change their behavior to get back in the group's good graces, or respond with rage and violence (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Of course, we all belong to many different groups, which vary in their importance to us. But the point to underscore is that as soon as we join a bunch of other people, we act differently than we would on our own. This change occurs regardless of whether the group has convened to solve problems and make decisions, has gathered to have a party, consists of anonymous bystanders or members of an Internet chat room, or is a crowd of spectators or celebrants.

Conformity

The first thing that people in groups do is conform, taking action or adopting attitudes as a result of real or imagined group pressure. Suppose that you are required to appear at a psychology laboratory for an experiment on perception. You join seven other students seated in a room. You are shown a 10-inch line and asked which of three other lines is identical to it. The correct answer, line A, is obvious, so you are amused when the first person in the group chooses line B. "Bad eyesight," you say to yourself. "He's off by 2 whole inches!" The second person also chooses line B. "What a dope," you think. But by the time the fifth person has chosen line B, you are beginning to doubt yourself. The sixth and seventh students also choose line B, and now you are worried about *your* eyesight. The experimenter looks at you. "Your turn," he says. Do you follow the evidence of your own eyes or the collective judgment of the group?

Test line   A   B   C
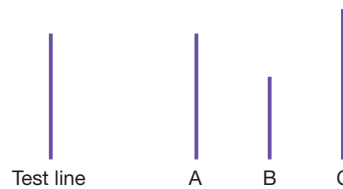
This was the design for a series of famous studies of conformity conducted by Solomon Asch (1952, 1965). The seven "nearsighted" students were actually Asch's confederates. Asch wanted to know what people would do when a group unanimously contradicted an obvious fact. He found that when people made the line comparisons on their own, they were almost always accurate. But in the group, only 20 percent of the students remained completely independent on every trial, and often they apologized for not agreeing with the others. One-third conformed to the group's incorrect decision more than half the time, and the rest conformed at least some of the time. Whether or not they conformed, the students often felt uncertain of their decision. As one participant later said, "I felt disturbed, puzzled, separated, like an outcast from the rest." Asch's experiment has been replicated

Get Involved! Can You Disconnect?

To see for yourself how social you are, try this simple experiment: Turn off your cell phone and laptop for a full 24 hours. *Off!* You may use your laptop to take notes in class, but that's all. No email, IMs, Twitter, Facebook, RSS, YouTube, or anything else on the Web. Keep track of your feelings on a (written!) notepad as time passes. Are you feeling anxious? Nervous? How long can you remain "cut off" before you start to feel isolated from your friends and family?

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

many times and in many countries (Bond & Smith, 1996).

Like obedience, conformity has positive aspects. Society runs more smoothly when people know how to behave in a given situation and when they share the same attitudes and manners. Conformity in dress, preferences, and ideas confers a sense of being in sync with friends and colleagues. Moreover, people often intuitively understand that sometimes the group knows more than they do. In fact, a reliance on group judgment begins in very early childhood, suggesting its adaptive function for the species. In two experiments with 3- and 4-year-old children, researchers found that when children were given a choice between relying on information provided by a three-adult majority or a single adult about the name of an unfamiliar object, they sided with the majority (Corriveau, Fusaro, & Harris, 2009).

But also like obedience, conformity has negative consequences, notably its power to suppress critical thinking and creativity. In a group, many people will deny their private beliefs, agree with silly notions, and even repudiate their own values.

Groupthink

Close, friendly groups usually work well together. But they face the problem of getting the best ideas and efforts from their members while avoiding an extreme form of conformity called **groupthink**, the tendency to think alike and suppress dissent. According to Irving Janis (1982, 1989), groupthink occurs when a group's need for total agreement overwhelms its

groupthink The tendency for all members of a group to think alike for the sake of harmony and to suppress disagreement.

need to make the wisest decision. The symptoms of groupthink include the following:

- *An illusion of invulnerability*. The group believes it can do no wrong and is 100 percent correct in its decisions.
- *Self-censorship*. Dissenters decide to keep quiet rather than make trouble, offend their friends, or risk being ridiculed.
- *Pressure on dissenters to conform*. The leader teases or humiliates dissenters or otherwise pressures them to go along.
- *An illusion of unanimity*. By discouraging dissent and failing to consider alternative courses of action, leaders and group members create an illusion of consensus; they may even explicitly order suspected dissenters to keep quiet.

Throughout history, groupthink has led to disastrous decisions in military and civilian life. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy and his advisers approved a CIA plan to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and try

to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro; the invasion was a humiliating defeat. In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon Johnson and his cabinet escalated the war in Vietnam in spite of obvious signs that further bombing and increased troops were not bringing the war to an end. In 1986, NASA officials insulated themselves from the dissenting objections of engineers who warned them that the space shuttle *Challenger* was unsafe; NASA launched it anyway, and it exploded shortly after takeoff. And when President George W. Bush launched an invasion of Iraq, claiming the country had weapons of mass destruction and was allied with al Qaeda, he and his team ignored dissenters and evidence from intelligence agencies that neither claim was true (Mayer, 2009). The agencies themselves later accused the Bush administration of "groupthink."

Fortunately, groupthink can be minimized if the leader rewards the expression of doubt and dissent, protects and encourages minority views, asks group members to generate as many alternative solutions to a problem as they can think of, and has everyone try to think of the risks and disadvantages of the preferred decision. Resistance to groupthink can also be fostered by creating a group identity that encourages members to think of themselves as open-minded problem solvers rather than invulnerable know-it-alls (Turner, Pratkanis, & Samuels, 2003). Leaders who encourage group members to identify strongly with the collective enterprise are also more likely to hear dissenting opinions, because members will be less willing to support a decision they regard as harmful to the group's goal (Packer, 2009).

Not all leaders want to run their groups this way, of course. For many people in positions of power, from presidents to company executives to movie moguls, the temptation is great to surround themselves with others who agree with what they want to do, and to demote or fire those who disagree on the grounds that they are being "disloyal." Perhaps a key quality of great leaders is that they are able to rise above this temptation.

The Wisdom and Madness of Crowds

On the TV show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?", contestants are given the chance to ask the audience how it would answer a question. This gimmick comes straight from a phenomenon known as the "wisdom of crowds": the fact that a crowd's judgment is often more accurate than that of its individual members (Surowiecki, 2004; Vul & Pashler, 2008). Just as neurons interconnect in networks that create thoughts and actions beyond the scope of any individual neuron, so a crowd creates a social network whose behavior is more than individual members may intend or even be aware of (Goldstone, Roberts, & Gureckis, 2008). But crowds can create havoc, too. They can spread gossip, rumors, misinformation, and panic as fast as the flu. They can turn from joyful and peaceful to violent and destructive in a flash.

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

The answer has to do with a group process called the **diffusion of responsibility**, in which responsibility for an outcome is diffused, or spread, among many people, reducing each individual's personal sense of accountability. One result is *bystander apathy:* In crowds, when someone is in trouble, individuals often fail to take action or call for help because they assume that someone else will do so (Darley & Latané, 1968).

When the "crowd" consists of online observers, it's even easier to pass the buck. Abraham Biggs Jr., age 19, had been posting to an online discussion board for two years. One day he announced his intention to commit suicide with an overdose of drugs, adding a link to a live video feed from his bedroom. None of the watchers called the police for more than ten hours, and Biggs died. In contrast, people are more likely to come to a stranger's aid if they are the only ones around to help, because responsibility cannot be diffused.

Deindividuation   The most extreme instances of the diffusion of responsibility occur in large, anonymous mobs or crowds. The crowds may consist of cheerful sports spectators or angry rioters. Either way, people often lose awareness of their individuality and seem to hand themselves over to the mood and actions of the crowd, a state called **deindividuation** (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952). You are more likely to feel deindividuated in a large city, where no one recognizes you, than in a small town, where it is hard to hide. (You are also more likely to feel deindividuated in large classes, where you might—mistakenly—think you are

Simulate Helping a Stranger on **mypsychlab.com**

diffusion of responsibility In groups, the tendency of members to avoid taking action because they assume that others will.

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

People in crowds, feeling anonymous, may do destructive things they would never do on their own. These soccer hooligans are kicking a fan of the opposition team during a night of violence.

invisible to the teacher, than in small ones.) Sometimes organizations actively promote the deindividuation of their members as a way of enhancing conformity and allegiance to the group. This is an important function of uniforms or masks, which eliminate each member's distinctive identity.

Deindividuation has long been considered a prime reason for mob violence. According to this explanation, because deindividuated people in crowds "forget themselves" and do not feel accountable for their actions, they are more likely to violate social norms and laws than they would be on their own: breaking store windows, looting, getting into fights, or rioting at a sports event. But deindividuation does not always make people more combative. Sometimes it makes them more friendly; think of all the chatty, anonymous people on buses and planes who reveal things to their seatmates they would never tell anyone they knew.

What really seems to be happening when people are in large crowds or anonymous situations is not that they become mindless or uninhibited. Rather, they become more likely to conform to the norms of the *specific situation* (Postmes & Spears, 1998). College students who go on wild sprees during spring break may be violating the local laws and norms of Palm Springs or Key West not because their aggressiveness has been released but because they are conforming to the "Let's party!" norms of their fellow students. Crowd norms can also foster helpfulness, as they often do in the aftermath of disasters, when strangers come out to help victims and rescue workers, leaving food, clothes, and tributes.

Quick Quiz

On your own, take responsibility for identifying which phenomenon is illustrated in each of the following situations.

1. The president's closest advisers are afraid to disagree with his views on energy policy.
2. You are at a costume party wearing a silly gorilla suit. When you see a chance to play a practical joke on the host, you do it.
3. Walking down a busy street, you see that fire has broken out in a store window. "Someone must already have called the fire department," you say.

Answers:

1. groupthink 2. deindividuation 3. bystander apathy brought on by diffusion of responsibility

Altruism and Dissent

We have seen how roles, norms, and pressures to obey authority and conform to one's group can cause people to behave in ways they might not otherwise. Yet throughout history men and women have disobeyed orders they believed to be wrong and have gone against prevailing cultural beliefs; their actions have sometimes changed the course of history. In 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, a shy, quiet woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, and she was arrested for breaking the law. Her protest sparked a 381-day bus boycott and helped launch the modern civil rights movement.

When people think of heroes, they usually think of men rescuing a child, risking gunfire to

bring a fellow soldier to safety, standing up to a bully, or landing an injured plane safely. This is the kind of heroism traditionally associated with men, who on average have greater physical strength than women. But when people are asked to name heroes they personally know, they name women and men equally (Rankin & Eagly, 2008). The reason is that many acts of selfless risk taking do not require physical strength. During the Holocaust, women in France, Poland, and the Netherlands were as likely as men to risk their lives to save Jews. Women are more likely than men to donate an organ such as a kidney to save another person's life, and women are more likely to volunteer to serve in dangerous postings around the world in the Peace Corps (Becker & Eagly, 2004).

Sadly, the costs of dissent, courage, and honesty are often high; remember that most groups do not welcome nonconformity and disagreement. Most whistle-blowers, far from being rewarded for their bravery, are punished for it. Three women were named *Time* magazine's Persons of the Year for their courage in exposing wrongdoing in their organizations—Enron, WorldCom, and the FBI— yet all paid a steep professional price for doing so. Studies of whistle-blowers find that half to two-thirds lose their jobs and have to leave their professions entirely. Many lose their homes and families (Alford, 2001). The two soldiers who first exposed the abuses going on at Abu Ghraib were shunned by many of their peers and received death threats; one was threatened with a court-martial.

Nonconformity, protest, and *altruism*, the willingness to take selfless or dangerous action on behalf of others, are in part a matter of personal convictions and conscience. However, just as there are situational reasons for obedience and conformity, so there are external influences on a person's decision to state an unpopular opinion, choose conscience over conformity, or help a stranger in trouble. Here are some of the situational factors that can overcome bystander apathy and increase the likelihood of helping others or behaving courageously:

1 **You perceive the need for intervention or help**. It may seem obvious, but before you can take independent action, you must realize that such action is necessary. Sometimes people willfully blind themselves to wrongdoing to justify their own inaction ("I'm just minding my business"; "I have no idea what they're doing over there at that concentration camp"). But blindness to the need for action also occurs when a situation imposes too many demands on people's attention, as it often does for residents of densely populated cities.

2 **Cultural norms encourage you to take action.** Would you spontaneously tell a passerby that he or she had dropped a pen? Offer to help a person with an injured leg who had dropped an armful of magazines? Assist a blind person across the street? An international field study investigated strangers' helpfulness to one another with those three non-emergency acts of kindness, in 23 American cities and 22 cities in other countries. Cultural norms for helping were more important than population density in predicting levels of helpfulness: Pedestrians in busy Copenhagen and Vienna were kinder to strangers than were passersby in busy New York City. Large differences in helping rates emerged, ranging from 93 percent in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to 40 percent in Kuala Lampur, Malaysia (Levine, 2003; Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001). People in Brazil and other Latin American cultures value *simpatía*, a cultural ideal of harmony and helping others (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009).

We tend to think of "heroes" as men who are physically brave, like the rescuers who searched for survivors in the rubble of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. But heroism comes in many forms, such as blowing the whistle on your employer's cover-up of wrongdoing or negligence. FBI special agent Coleen Rowley was fired for testifying to the Senate that the FBI had blocked the investigation of a man involved in planning the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers.

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

4 **You become entrapped.** Does this sound familiar by now? Once having taken the initial step of getting involved, most people will increase their commitment. In one study, nearly 9,000 federal employees were asked whether they had observed wrongdoing at work, whether they had told anyone about it, and what happened if they had told. Nearly half of the sample had observed some serious cases of wrongdoing, such as stealing federal funds, accepting bribes, or creating a situation that was dangerous to public safety. Of that half, 72 percent had done nothing at all, but the other 28 percent reported the problem to their immediate supervisors. Once they had taken that step, a majority of the whistle-blowers eventually took the matter to higher authorities (Graham, 1986).

As you can see, certain social and cultural factors make altruism, disobedience, and dissent more likely to occur, just as other external factors suppress them.

Quick Quiz

We hope you won't disobey our order to answer this question.

Imagine that you are chief executive officer of a new electric-car company. You want your employees to feel free to offer their suggestions and criticisms to improve productivity and satisfaction. You also want them to inform managers if they find any evidence that the cars are unsafe, even if that means delaying production. What concepts from this chapter could you use in setting company policy?

Answers:

Some possibilities: You could encourage, or even require, dissenting views; avoid deindividuation by rewarding innovative suggestions and implementing the best ones; stimulate employees' commitment to the task (building a car that will solve the world's pollution problem); and establish a written policy to protect whistle-blowers. What else can you think of?

YOU are about to learn...

- how people in a multicultural society balance ethnic identity and acculturation.
- what causes ethnocentric, us–them thinking and how to decrease it.
- how stereotypes benefit us and how they distort reality.

Us versus Them: Group Identity

Each of us develops a personal identity that is based on our particular traits and unique life history. But we also develop **social identities** based on the groups we belong to, including our national, religious, political, and occupational groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

social identity The part of a person's self-concept that is based on his or her identification with a nation, religious or political group, occupation, or other social affiliation.

ethnic identity A person's identification with a racial or ethnic group.

acculturation The process by which members of minority groups come to identify with and feel part of the mainstream culture.

Ethnic Identity

In multicultural societies such as the United States and Canada, different social identities often collide. In particular, people often face the dilemma of balancing an **ethnic identity**, a close identification with a religious or ethnic group, and **acculturation**, identification with the dominant culture (Berry, 2006; Phinney, 1996). The hallmarks of having an ethnic identity are that you identify with the group, feel proud to be a member, feel emotionally attached to the group, and behave in ways that conform to the group's rules, values, and norms. Interestingly, many Americans these days do not want to be pigeonholed into only one ethnic category. Millions list themselves in the national census as having various combinations of identities, such as Blaxican (African American and Mexican), Negripino (African American and Filipino), Hafu (half Japanese, half something else), and Chino-Latino (Chinese and Hispanic).

Monica Almeida/The New York Times

Ethnic identities are changing these days, as bicultural North Americans blend aspects of mainstream culture with their own traditions. Many people still like to celebrate the traditions of their ethnic heritage, as illustrated in these photos of Japanese-American college students reviving *taiko*, traditional Japanese drumming, Ukrainian-American teens wearing national dress, and African-American children lighting Kwanzaa candles.

Nevertheless, any observer of the world today knows that acculturation is not always easy and seamless. Many immigrants arrive in their host country with every intention of becoming part of the mainstream culture. If they encounter discrimination or setbacks, however, they may realize that acculturation is harder than they anticipated and that their original ethnic identity offers greater solace; this is why new immigrants often report poorer mental and physical health in response to the stresses of trying to acculturate than their children do (Schwartz et al., 2010). In any case, a person's degree of acculturation may change throughout life in response to experiences and societal events. At any given moment in their lives, people pick and choose among the values, food, traditions, and customs of the mainstream culture, while also keeping aspects of their heritage that are important to their self-identity.

Ethnocentrism

Social identities give us a sense of place and position in the world. Without them, most of us would feel like loose marbles rolling around in an unconnected universe. It feels good to be part of an "us." But does that mean that we must automatically feel superior to "them"?

Ethnocentrism is the belief that your own culture, nation, or religion is superior to all others. Ethnocentrism is universal, probably because it aids survival by increasing people's attachment to their own group and their willingness to work on its behalf. It is even embedded in some languages: The Chinese word for China means "the center of the world" (consigning the other five billion people to the suburbs?) and the Navajo, the Kiowa, and the Inuit call themselves simply "The People."

Ethnocentrism rests on a fundamental social identity: us. As soon as people have created a category called "us," however, they invariably perceive everybody else as "not-us." This in-group solidarity can be manufactured in a minute in the laboratory, as Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (1971) demonstrated in an experiment with British schoolboys. Tajfel showed the boys slides with varying numbers of dots on them and asked the boys to guess how many dots

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

there were. The boys were arbitrarily told that they were "overestimators" or "underestimators" and were then asked to work on another task. In this phase, they had a chance to give points to other boys identified as overestimators or underestimators. Although each boy worked alone in his cubicle, almost every single one assigned far more points to boys he thought were like him, an overestimator or an underestimator. As the boys emerged from their rooms, they were asked, "Which were you?" The answers received either cheers or boos from the others.

Us–them social identities are strengthened when two groups compete with each other. Years ago, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues used a natural setting, a Boy Scout camp called Robbers Cave, to demonstrate the effects of competition on hostility and conflict between groups (Sherif, 1958; Sherif et al., 1961). Sherif randomly assigned 11- and 12-year-old boys to two groups, the Eagles and the Rattlers. To build a sense of in-group identity and team spirit, he had each group work together on projects such as making a rope bridge and building a diving board. Sherif then put the Eagles and Rattlers in competition for prizes. During fierce games of football, baseball, and tug-of-war, the boys whipped up a competitive fever that soon spilled off the playing fields. They began to raid each other's cabins, call each other names, and start fistfights. No one dared to have a friend from the rival group. Before long, the Eagles and the Rattlers were as hostile toward each other as any two gangs fighting for turf. Their hostility continued even when they were just sitting around together watching movies.

Then Sherif decided to try to undo the hostility he had created and make peace between the Eagles and Rattlers. He and his associates set up a series of predicaments in which both groups needed to work together to reach a desired goal, such as pooling their resources to get a movie they all wanted to see or pulling a staff truck up a hill on a camping trip. This policy of *interdependence in reaching mutual goals* was highly successful in reducing the boys' "ethnocentrism," competitiveness, and hostility; the boys eventually made friends with their former enemies (see Figure 10.3). Interdependence has a similar effect in adult groups (Gaertner et al., 1990). The reason, it seems, is that cooperation causes people to think of themselves as members of one big group instead of two opposed groups, us and them.

Stereotypes

Think of all the ways your friends and family members differ: Jeff is stodgy, Ruth is bossy, Farah is outgoing. But if you have never met a person from

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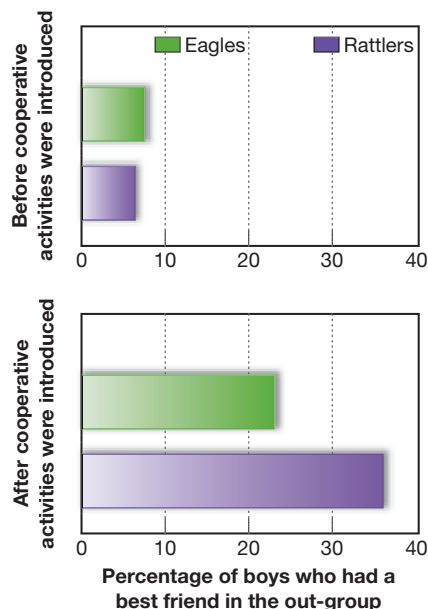

FIGURE 10.3

The Experiment at Robbers Cave
In this study, competitive games fostered hostility between the Rattlers and the Eagles. Few boys had a best friend from the other group (upper graph). But after the teams had to cooperate to solve various problems, the percentage who made friends across "enemy lines" shot up (lower graph) (Sherif et al., 1961).

Turkey or Tibet, you are likely to stereotype Turks and Tibetans. A **stereotype** is a summary impression of a group of people in which all members of the group are viewed as sharing a common trait or traits. There are stereotypes of people who drive Hummers or Hondas, of engineering students and art students, of feminists and fraternity men.

Stereotypes aren't necessarily bad and they are sometimes very accurate (Jussim et al., 2009). They are, as some psychologists have called them, useful tools in the mental toolbox—energy-saving devices that allow us to make efficient decisions (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). They help us quickly process new information and retrieve memories. They allow us to organize experience, make sense of differences among individuals and groups, and predict how people will behave. In fact, the brain automatically registers and encodes the basic categories of gender, ethnicity, and age, suggesting that there is a neurological basis for the cognitive efficiency of stereotyping (Ito & Urland, 2003).

However, although stereotypes may reflect real differences among people, they also distort that reality in three ways (Judd et al., 1995). First, *they exaggerate differences between groups*, making the

stereotyped group seem odd, unfamiliar, or danger-
ous, not like "us." Second, *they produce selective per-
ception*; people tend to see only the evidence that fits
the stereotype and reject any perceptions that do
not fit. Third, *they underestimate differences within
the stereotyped group*, creating the impression that all
members of that group are the same.

When people like a group, their stereotype of
the group's behavior tends to be positive. When
they dislike a group, their stereotype *of the same be-
havior* tends to be negative. A person who is careful
with money, after all, can be seen as "thrifty" or
"stingy"; someone who values family life might be
"family-loving" or "clannish" (Peabody, 1985).
Cultural values affect how people evaluate the ac-
tions of another group and whether a stereotype
becomes positive or negative. Chinese students in
Hong Kong, where communalism and respect for
elders are valued, think that a student who comes
late to class or argues with a parent about grades is
being selfish and disrespectful of adults. But Aus-
tralian students, who value individualism, think
that the same behavior is perfectly appropriate
(Forgas & Bond, 1985). You can see how the Chi-
nese might form negative stereotypes of "disre-
spectful" Australians, and how the Australians

What is this woman's occupation? Among non-Muslims in the West, the as-
sumption is that Muslim women who wear the full-length black *niqab* must
be repressed sexually as well as politically. But the answer shatters the
stereotype. Wedad Lootah, a Muslim living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates,
is a marriage counselor and sexual activist, author of a best-selling Arabic
book, *Top Secret: Sexual Guidance for Married Couples.*

might form negative stereotypes of the "spineless"
Chinese. And it is a small step from negative
stereotypes to prejudice.

Quick Quiz

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

1. Frank, an African-American college student, has to decide between living in a dorm with mostly white students
   who share his interest in science, or living in a dorm with other black students who are studying the history and
   contributions of African culture. The first choice values _____ whereas the second values_____.

2. John knows and likes the Chicano minority in his town, but he privately believes that Anglo culture is supe-
   rior to all others. His belief is evidence of his _____.

3. What strategy does the Robbers Cave study suggest for reducing us–them thinking and hostility between
   groups?

4. What are three ways in which stereotypes can distort reality?

Answers:

1. acculturation, ethnic identity 2. ethnocentrism 3. interdependence in reaching mutual goals 4. They exaggerate differences be-
tween groups; they produce selective perception; and they underestimate differences *within* the stereotyped group.

◆ YOU are about to learn...

- **four causes and functions of prejudice.**
- **four indirect ways of measuring prejudice.**
- **four conditions necessary for reducing prejudice and
  conflict.**

Group Conflict
and Prejudice

A **prejudice** consists of a negative stereotype and a
strong, unreasonable dislike or hatred of a group. A
central feature of a prejudice is that it remains

prejudice A strong,
unreasonable dislike or
hatred of a group, based
on a negative stereotype.

immune to evidence. In his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport (1954/1979) described the responses characteristic of a prejudiced person when confronted with evidence contradicting his or her beliefs:

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

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

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

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

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

Notice that Mr. X doesn't even try to respond to Mr. Y's evidence; he just moves along to another reason for his dislike of Jews. That is the slippery nature of prejudice in general and toward Jews in particular. Indeed, many of the stereotypes underlying anti-Semitism are mutually contradictory and constantly shift across generations and nations. Jews were attacked for being Communists in Nazi Germany and Argentina, and for being greedy capitalists in the Communist Soviet Union. They have been criticized for being too secular and also for being too mystical, for being weak and also for being powerful enough to dominate the world. Although anti-Semitism declined in the 50 years after World War II, it has been on the rise again in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and around the world (Cohen et al., 2009).

The Origins of Prejudice

Prejudice provides the fuel for ethnocentrism. Its specific targets change, but it persists everywhere in some form because it has so many sources and functions: psychological, social, economic, and cultural:

1 **Psychological causes**. Prejudice often serves to ward off feelings of doubt, fear, and insecurity. Around the world, people puff up their low self-esteem or self-worth by disliking or hating groups they see as inferior (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan et al., 1994). Prejudice also allows people to use the target group as a scapegoat ("Those people

are the source of all my troubles"), to displace anger and cope with feelings of powerlessness. Immediately after 9/11, some white Americans took out their anger on fellow Americans who happened to be Arab, Sikh, Pakistani, Hindu, or Afghan. Two men in Chicago beat up an Arab-American taxi driver, yelling, "This is what you get, you mass murderer!"

Prejudice may also help people defend against the existential terror of death (Cohen et al., 2009; Pyszczynski, Rothschild, & Abdollahi, 2008). People in every culture hold political or religious worldviews that provide them with a sense of meaning, purpose, and hope of immortality (either through an afterlife or through a connection to something greater than themselves). If that worldview helps alleviate the fear of their own mortality, they will be deeply threatened by the mere existence of others who reject their way of seeing things. Many people manage that threat by denigrating opposing groups, attempting to convert them, or even trying to exterminate them (Greenberg, Solomon, & Arndt, 2008).

2 **Social causes.** Not all prejudices, however, have deep-seated psychological roots. Some are acquired through pressure to conform to the views of friends, relatives, or associates; if you don't agree with a group's prejudices toward another group, you may be gently or abruptly asked to leave the group. Some are passed along mindlessly from one generation to another, as when parents communicate to their children, "We don't associate with people like that."

3 **Economic causes**. Prejudice makes official forms of discrimination seem legitimate, by justifying the majority group's dominance, status, or greater wealth. Wherever a majority group systematically discriminates against a minority to preserve its power—whites, blacks, Muslims, Hindus, Japanese, Christians, Jews, you name it—they will claim that their actions are legitimate because the minority is so obviously inferior and incompetent (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Morton et al., 2009; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

You can see how prejudice rises and falls with changing economic conditions by observing what happens when two groups are in direct competition for jobs, or when people are worried about their incomes: Prejudice between them increases. Consider how white attitudes toward Chinese immigrants in the United States fluctuated during the nineteenth century, as reflected in newspapers of the time (Aronson, 2008). When the Chinese were working in the gold mines and potentially taking jobs from white laborers, the white-run newspapers described

them as depraved, vicious, and bloodthirsty. Just a decade later, when the Chinese began working on the transcontinental railroad, doing difficult and dangerous jobs that few white men wanted, prejudice against them declined. Whites described them as hardworking, industrious, and law-abiding. Then, after the railroad was finished and the Chinese had to compete with Civil War veterans for scarce jobs, white attitudes changed again. Whites now thought the Chinese were "criminal," "crafty," "conniving," and "stupid." (The newspapers did not report the attitudes of the Chinese.) Today's Chinese are Mexican, particularly the migrant workers whose labor is needed in America but who are perceived as costing Americans their jobs.

The oldest prejudice in the world may be sexism, and it, too, serves to legitimize existing sex roles and inequities in power. In research with 15,000 men and women in 19 nations, psychologists found that *hostile sexism*, which reflects active dislike of women, is different from *benevolent sexism*, which puts women on a pedestal. The latter type of sexism is affectionate but patronizing, conveying the attitude that women are so good, kind, and moral that they should stay at home, away from the rough-and-tumble (and power and income) of public life (Glick et al., 2000; Glick, 2006). Because benevolent sexism lacks a tone of hostility to women, it doesn't seem like a prejudice to many people, and many women find it alluring to think they are better than men. But both forms of sexism, whether someone thinks women are too good for equality or not good enough, legitimize discrimination against women (Christopher & Wojda, 2008).

Perhaps you are thinking: "Hey, what about men? There are plenty of prejudices against men, too—that they are sexual predators, emotionally heartless, domineering, and arrogant." In fact, according to a 16-nation study of attitudes toward men, many people do believe that men are aggressive and predatory, and overall just not as warm and wonderful as women (Glick et al., 2004). This attitude seems hostile to men, the researchers found,

but it also reflects and supports gender inequality by characterizing men as being designed for leadership and dominance.

4 Cultural and national causes. Finally, prejudice bonds people to their own ethnic or national group and its ways; by disliking "them," we feel closer to our own group. That feeling, in turn, justifies whatever we do to "them" to preserve our customs and national policies. In fact, although many people assume that prejudice causes war, the reverse is far more often the case: War causes prejudice. When two nations declare war, when one country decides to invade another, or when a weak leader displaces the country's economic problems onto a minority scapegoat, the citizenry's prejudice against that enemy or scapegoat will be inflamed. Of course, sometimes anger at an enemy is justified, but war usually turns legitimate anger into blind prejudice: Those people are not only the enemy; they are less than human and deserve to be exterminated (Keen, 1986; Staub, 1999). That is why enemies are so often described as vermin, rats, mad dogs, heathens, baby killers, or monsters—anything but human beings like us.

In times of war, most people fall victim to emotional reasoning, thinking of the enemy as being less than human, often as vermin, dogs, or pigs. After 9/11, anti-American demonstrators in Jakarta portrayed former president George W. Bush as a rabid dog, while an American cartoonist lumped the Taliban, Iraq, and Iran into a "barrel of vermin."

Get Involved! Probing Your Prejudices

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

Defining and Measuring Prejudice

With the historic election in 2008 of Barack Obama as the nation's first African-American president, many people became hopeful that the worst forms of racism in America were ending. Certainly, on surveys in the United States and Canada, overt prejudice of all kinds has been declining sharply. The numbers of people who admit to believing that blacks are inferior to whites, women inferior to men, and gays inferior to straights have been steadily dropping in the last 65 years (Weaver, 2008).

Yet, as Gordon Allport (1954/1979) observed so long ago, "defeated intellectually, prejudice lingers emotionally." Discriminatory behavior may be outlawed, but deep-seated negative feelings and bigotry may nonetheless persist in subtle ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2008). And, as we just saw, such feelings may lie dormant during good times, only to be easily aroused during bad times or when people feel threatened socially or economically. By the end of 2009, anti-black hate crimes had risen 8 percent over the previous two years (Blow, 2009).

That is why prejudice is like a weasel—hard to grasp and hold on to. One problem is that not all prejudiced people are prejudiced in the same way or to the same extent. Suppose that Raymond wishes to be

> **Thinking Critically about Defining Prejudice**

The Many Targets of Prejudice

Prejudice has a long and universal history. Why do new prejudices keep emerging, others fade away, and some old ones persist?

Some prejudices rise and fall with events. When France refused to support America's decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003, anti-French anger erupted (as the scrawled sign telling the French to go back to France, where they were anyway, indicates). Anti-Japanese feelings in the United States ran high in the 1920s and again in the 1990s as a result of economic competition between the two countries, and Irish immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also endured extensive discrimination. Today, prejudices against the French, Japanese, and Irish have faded. In contrast, some hatreds, notably homophobia and anti-Semitism, reflect people's deeper anxieties and are therefore more persistent.

tolerant and open-minded, but he grew up in a small homogeneous community and feels uncomfortable with members of other cultural and religious groups. Should we put Raymond in the same category as Rupert, an outspoken bigot who actively detests all ethnic groups other than his own? Do good intentions count? What if Raymond knows nothing about Muslims and mindlessly blurts out a remark that reveals his ignorance? Is that prejudice or thoughtlessness? And what about people who say they are not prejudiced but then make sexist or racist remarks when they are drunk or angered?

Some social psychologists, while welcoming the evidence that *explicit*, conscious prejudices have declined, have used ingenious measures to see whether *implicit*, unconscious negative feelings between groups have also diminished. They maintain that implicit attitudes, being automatic and unintentional, reflect lingering negative feelings that keep prejudice alive below the surface (Dovidio, 2009). They have developed several ways of measuring these feelings (Olson, 2009):

1 **Measures of social distance.** *Social distance* is a possible behavioral expression of prejudice, a reluctance to get "too close" to another group. Does a straight man stand farther away from a gay man than from another heterosexual? Does a nondisabled woman move away from a woman in

Today, it is Muslim Americans and Mexican Americans who are often the target of prejudice—the former, because of the fear of terrorism; the latter, because of the fear of economic competition.

a wheelchair? How close will a person let "those people" into his or her social life: work with them, live near them...marry them? A review of decades of representative surveys of the American population found that although overt prejudice among Hispanics, whites, blacks, Jews, and Asians has dropped, most people *within* each ethnic group are still strongly opposed to virtually all of the other ethnic groups living in their neighborhoods or marrying into their families (Weaver, 2008). But does this fact reflect prejudice or merely a comfort with and preference for one's own ethnicity?

2 **Measures of what people do when they are stressed or angry.** Many people are willing to control their negative feelings under normal conditions, but as soon as they are angry, drunk, or frustrated or get a jolt to their self-esteem, their unexpressed prejudice often reveals itself.

In one of the first experiments to demonstrate this phenomenon, white students were asked to administer shock to black or white confederates of the experimenter in what the students believed was a study of biofeedback. In the experimental condition, participants overheard the biofeedback "victim" (who actually received no shock) saying derogatory things about them. In the control condition, participants overheard no such nasty remarks. Then all the participants had another opportunity to shock the victims; their degree of aggression was defined as the amount of shock they administered. At first, white students showed *less* aggression toward blacks than toward whites. But as soon as the white students were angered by overhearing derogatory remarks about themselves, they showed *more* aggression toward blacks than toward whites (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1981). The same pattern appears in studies of how English-speaking Canadians behave toward French-speaking Canadians (Meindl & Lerner, 1985), straights toward gays, non-Jewish students toward Jews (Fein & Spencer, 1997), and men toward women (Maass et al., 2003).

3 **Measures of brain activity.** Another method relies on fMRI and PET scans to determine which parts of the brain are involved in forming stereotypes, holding prejudiced beliefs, and feeling disgust, anger, or anxiety about another ethnic group (Cacioppo et al., 2003; Harris & Fiske, 2006; Stanley, Phelps, & Banaji, 2008). In one study, when African Americans and whites saw pictures of each other, activity in the amygdala (the brain structure associated with fear and other negative emotions) was elevated. But it was not elevated when people saw pictures of members of their own group (Hart et al., 2000).

However, the fact that parts of the brain are activated under some conditions does not mean a person is prejudiced. In a similar experiment, when white participants were registering the faces as individuals or as part of a simple visual test rather than as members of the category "blacks," there was no increased activation in the amygdala. The brain may be designed to register differences, it appears, but any negative associations with those differences depend on context and learning (Wheeler & Fiske, 2005).

4 **Measures of implicit attitudes.** A final, controversial method of assessing prejudice is the *Implicit Association Test (IAT)*, which measures the speed of people's positive and negative associations to a target group (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Greenwald et al., 2009). Its proponents have argued that if white students take longer to respond to black faces associated with positive words (e.g., *triumph, honest*) than to black faces associated with negative words (e.g., *devil, failure*), it must mean that white students have an unconscious, implicit prejudice toward blacks, one that can affect behavior in various ways. More than three million people have taken the test online, and it has also been given to students, business managers, and many other groups to identify their alleged prejudices toward blacks, Asians, women, old people, and other categories (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007).

We say "alleged" prejudices because other social psychologists believe that whatever the test measures, it is not a stable prejudice; they point out that test–retest reliability is low, and scores on the IAT predict a person's actual discriminatory behavior only minimally (Blanton et al., 2009; De Houwer et al., 2009). Two researchers got an IAT effect by matching target faces with nonsense words and neutral words that had no evaluative connotations at all. They concluded that the IAT does not measure emotional evaluations of the target but rather the *salience* of the word associated with it—how much it stands out. (Negative words attract more attention in general.) When the researchers corrected for these factors, the presumed unconscious prejudice faded away (Rothermund & Wentura, 2004).

Moreover, as we saw earlier, people find familiar names, products, and even nonsense syllables to be more pleasant than unfamiliar ones. Some investigators argue that the IAT may simply be measuring, say, white subjects' unfamiliarity with African

Americans and the greater salience of white faces to them, rather than a true prejudice (Kinoshita & Peek-O'Leary, 2005). Nonetheless, it's clear that people often have unconscious dislikes of, and discomforts with, members of other groups—prejudices they may be unwilling to admit even to themselves.

As you can see, defining and measuring prejudice are not easy tasks, and it's important not to oversimplify. To understand prejudice, we must distinguish explicit attitudes from unconscious ones, active hostility from simple discomfort, what people say from what they feel, and what people feel from how they actually behave.

Reducing Conflict and Prejudice

The findings that emerge from the study of prejudice show us that efforts to reduce prejudice by appealing to moral or intellectual arguments are not enough. They must also touch people's deeper insecurities, fears, or negative associations with a group. Of course, given the many sources and functions of prejudice, no one method will work in all circumstances or for all prejudices. But just as social psychologists investigate the situations that increase prejudice and animosity between groups, they have also examined the situations that might reduce them. Here are four (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006): ((•─ **Listen**

1 **Both sides must have many opportunities to work and socialize together, formally and informally.** According to the *contact hypothesis*, prejudice declines when people have the chance to get used to another group's rules, food, customs, and attitudes, thereby discovering their shared interests and shared humanity and learning that "those people" aren't, in fact, "all alike." The contact hypothesis has been supported by many studies in the laboratory and in the real world: studies of newly integrated housing projects in the American South during the 1950s and 1960s; young people's attitudes toward the elderly; healthy people's attitudes toward the mentally ill; nondisabled children's attitudes toward the disabled; and straight people's prejudices toward gay men and lesbians (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wilner, Walkley, & Cook, 1955).

Multiethnic college campuses are living laboratories for testing the contact hypothesis. White students who have roommates, friends, and romantic relationships across ethnic lines tend to become less prejudiced and find commonalities (Van Laar,

Levin, & Sidanius, 2008). Cross-group friendships benefit minorities and reduce their prejudices, too. Minority students who join ethnic student organizations tend to develop, over time, not only an even stronger ethnic identity, but also an increased sense of ethnic victimization. Just like white students who live in white fraternities and sororities, they often come to feel they have less in common with other ethnic groups (Sidanius et al., 2004). But a longitudinal study of black and Latino students at a predominantly white university found that friendships with whites increased their feelings of belonging and reduced their feelings of dissatisfaction with the school (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). (See Figure 10.4.)

2 **Both sides must have equal legal status, economic opportunities, and power.** This requirement is the spur behind efforts to change laws that permit discrimination. Integration of public facilities in the American South would never have occurred if civil rights advocates had waited for segregationists to have a change of heart. Women

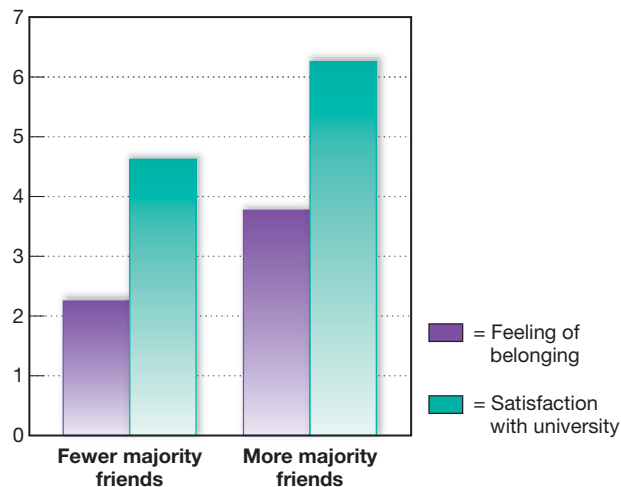((•─ **Listen** to **Prejudice** on **mypsychlab.com**

FIGURE 10.4

The Impact of Cross-Ethnic Friendships on Minority Students' Well-Being

Cross-ethnic friendships benefit both parties. In a longitudinal study of minority black students at a predominantly white university, many black students at first felt left out of school life and thus dissatisfied with their educational experience. But the more white friends they made, the higher their sense of belonging (purple bar) and satisfaction with the university (green bar). This finding was particularly significant for minority students who had initially been the most sensitive to rejection and who had felt the most anxious and insecure about being in a largely white school. The study was later replicated with minority Latino students (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008).

would never have gotten the right to vote, attend college, or do "men's work" (law, medicine, bartending…) without persistent challenges to the laws that barred them from having these rights. But changing the law is not enough if two groups remain in competition for jobs or if one group retains power and dominance over the other.

3 **Authorities and community institutions must provide moral, legal, and economic support for both sides.** Society must establish norms of equality and support them in the actions of its officials—teachers, employers, the judicial system, government officials, and the police. Where segregation is official government policy or an unofficial but established practice, conflict and prejudice not only will continue but also will seem normal and justified.

4 **Both sides must cooperate, working together for a common goal.** Although contact reduces prejudice, it is also true that prejudice reduces contact. And when groups don't like each other, forced contact just makes each side resentful and even more prejudiced, as a longitudinal field survey of students in Germany, Belgium, and England found (Binder et al., 2009). At many multiethnic American high schools, ethnic groups form cliques and gangs, fighting one another and defending their own ways.

To reduce the intergroup tension and competition that exist in many schools, Elliot Aronson and his colleagues developed the "jigsaw" method of building cooperation. Students from different ethnic groups work together on a task that is broken up like a jigsaw puzzle; each person needs to coop-

When classrooms are structured so that students of different ethnic groups must cooperate in order to do well on a lesson, prejudice decreases.

erate with the others to put the assignment together. Students in such classes, from elementary school through college, tend to do better, like their classmates better, and become less stereotyped and prejudiced in their thinking than students in traditional classrooms (Aronson, 2000; Slavin & Cooper, 1999). Cooperation and interdependence often reduce us–them thinking and prejudice by creating an encompassing social identity—the Eagles and Rattlers solution.

Each of these four approaches to creating greater harmony between groups is important, but none is sufficient on its own. Perhaps one reason that group conflicts and prejudice are so persistent is that all four conditions for reducing them are rarely met at the same time.

Quick Quiz

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

1. What are four ways of measuring implicit or unconscious prejudice?

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

3. Surveys find that African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos often hold prejudices about other minorities. What are some reasons that people who have themselves been victims of stereotyping and prejudice would hold the same attitudes toward others?

Answers:

1. Measures of social distance; of how aggressively people behave toward a target person when they are angry or stressed; of physiological changes in the brain; and of unconscious negative associations with a target group. **2.** Have opportunities to socialize formally and informally; both sides must have equal status and power; have the moral, legal, and economic support of authorities; and cooperate for a common goal. **3.** Their own ethnocentrism; low self-esteem, anxiety, or feelings of threat; conformity with relatives and friends who share their prejudices; parental lessons; and economic competition for jobs and resources.

Psychology in the News REVISITED
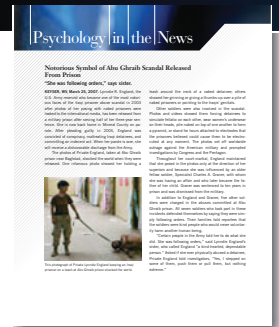
After reading this chapter, why do you think the guards at Abu Ghraib abused and humiliated their prisoners? As we have seen, it is not enough to offer a dispositional (personality) attribution, saying that the soldiers were bad or sadistic individuals.

Social psychologists would explain the behavior of Lynndie England and her fellow soldiers by considering the roles they were assigned, which gave them unlimited control over the detainees. They would also emphasize the group norms among the soldiers. The fact that the guards willingly posed for pictures—in many, they are smiling proudly—indicates that they were showing off for their friends and that they believed their behavior was appropriate. In all likelihood, they were able to justify their behavior by blaming the victims, saying that the detainees (who had not yet been found guilty of any crime) deserved whatever harsh treatment they got.

As for the soldiers' defense that they were "only following orders," this did not appear to be the case. There *should* have been orders from higher-ups, or at least clear rules for the treatment of detainees. But

Pentagon investigations concluded that no one authorized or encouraged the soldiers' abusive treatment of prisoners. The detention center was chaotic and poorly run, and rules on treatment of detainees were so vague and changed so frequently that even higher-ranking soldiers did not know the difference between abuse and acceptable interrogation techniques. In the midst of this chaos, the soldiers made up their own rules and group norms, and once they were in place, most went along with their peers.

The bright spot in this bleak picture is that not every soldier at Abu Ghraib humiliated and tortured the detainees. Some refused to participate. Some informed their commanding officers. Some, like Joe Darby, eventually blew the whistle publicly, at great personal cost. These individuals did not mindlessly pass along responsibility for their actions to their senior officers—or, in Lynndie England's case, to her then-boyfriend Charles Graner.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that "human nature" contains the potential for unspeakable acts of cruelty and inspiring acts of goodness. Most people

The most difficult lesson of social psychology is that ordinary people can do monstrous things. Mohamed Atta (left) was described by his friends as being "full of idealism" and a "humanist" who was searching for justice; on September 11, 2001, Atta led the 19 hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing almost 3,000 people. In Rwanda in 1994, when the Hutu shot or hacked to death nearly one million Tutsi, a rival tribe, hundreds of Tutsi took refuge in a Benedictine convent. Instead of protecting them, the mother superior, Sister Gertrude, and another nun, Sister Maria Kisito, reported the refugees to the Hutu militia, who massacred the trapped victims. At their subsequent trial in Brussels, the two Hutu nuns were sentenced to 15- and 12-year prison terms for crimes against humanity.

Thinking Critically about "Evil" Cultures

believe that some cultures and individuals are inherently good or evil; if we can just get rid of those few evil ones, everything will be fine. But from the standpoint of social and cultural psychology, all human beings, like all cultures, contain the potential for both.

In this respect, virtually no country has bloodless hands. The Nazis, of course, systematically exterminated millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, disabled people, and anyone else not of the "pure" Aryan "race." But Americans and Canadians slaughtered native peoples in North America, Turks slaughtered Armenians, the Khmer Rouge slaughtered millions of fellow Cambodians, the Spanish conquistadors slaughtered native peoples in Mexico and South America, Idi Amin waged a reign of terror against his own people in Uganda, the Japanese slaughtered Koreans and Chinese, Iraqis slaughtered Kurds, despotic political regimes in Argentina and Chile killed thousands of dissidents and rebels, the Hutu in Rwanda murdered thousands of Tutsi, and in the former Yugoslavia, Bosnian Serbs massacred thousands of Bosnian Muslims in the name of "ethnic cleansing."

It is easy to conclude that outbreaks of violence like these are a result of inner aggressive drives, the sheer evilness of the enemy, or "age-old tribal hatreds." But in the social–psychological view, they result from the all-too-normal processes we have discussed in this chapter, including ethnocentrism, obedience to authority, conformity, groupthink, deindividuation, stereotyping, and prejudice. These processes are especially likely to be activated when a government feels weakened and vulnerable. By generating an outside enemy, rulers create us–them thinking as a means of imposing order and cohesion among their citizens and to create a scapegoat for the country's economic problems (Smith, 1998; Staub, 1996). The good news is that when circumstances within a nation change, societies can also change from being warlike to being peaceful. Sweden was once one of the most warlike nations on earth, but today they are among the most pacifistic and egalitarian.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt covered the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi officer who supervised the deportation and death of millions of Jews. Arendt (1963) used the phrase *the banality of evil* to describe how it was possible for Eichmann and other ordinary people in Nazi Germany to commit the atrocities they did. (*Banal* means "commonplace" or "unoriginal.") The compelling evidence for the banality of evil is, perhaps, the hardest lesson in psychology. The research discussed in this chapter suggests that aggression, ethnocentrism, and prejudice will always be with us, as long as differences exist among groups. But it can also help us formulate realistic yet nonviolent ways of living in a diverse world. By identifying the conditions that create the banality of evil, perhaps we can create situations that foster the "banality of virtue"—everyday acts of kindness, selflessness, and generosity.

Taking Psychology with You

Dealing with Cultural Differences

A French salesman worked for a company that was bought by Americans. When the new American manager ordered him to step up his sales within the next three months, the employee quit in a huff, taking his customers with him. Why? In France, it takes years to develop customers; in family-owned businesses, relationships with customers may span generations. The American manager wanted instant results, as Americans often do, but the French salesman knew this was impossible and quit. The American view was, "He wasn't up to the job; he's lazy and disloyal, so he stole my customers." The French view was, "There is no point in explaining anything to a person who is so stupid as to think you can acquire loyal customers in three months" (Hall & Hall, 1987).

Both men were committing the fundamental attribution error: assuming that the other person's behavior was due to personality rather than the situation, in this case a situation governed by cultural rules. Many corporations now realize that such rules are not trivial and that success in a global economy depends on understanding them. But you don't have to go to another country to encounter cultural differences; they are right here at home.

If you find yourself getting angry over something a person from another culture is doing or not doing, use the skills of critical thinking to find out whether your expectations and perceptions of that person's behavior are appropriate. Take the time to examine your assumptions and biases, consider other

explanations of the other person's actions, and avoid emotional reasoning. For example, people who shake hands as a gesture of friendship and courtesy are likely to feel insulted if a person from a non-hand-shaking culture refuses to do the same, unless they have asked themselves the question, "Does everyone have the custom of shaking hands the way I do?"

Similarly, people from Middle Eastern and Latin American cultures are used to bargaining for what they buy; Americans and northern Europeans are used to having a fixed price. People who do not know how to bargain, therefore, are likely to find bargaining an exercise in frustration because they will not know whether they got taken or got a great deal. In contrast, people from bargaining cultures will feel just as exasperated if a seller offers a flat price. "Where's the fun in this?" they'll say. "The whole human transaction of shopping is gone!"

Learning another culture's rule or custom is hard enough, but it is much more difficult to comprehend cultural differences that are deeply embedded in its language. For instance, in Iran, the social principle of *taarof*

describes the practice of deliberate insincerity, such as giving false praise and making promises you have no intention of keeping. Iranians know that they are supposed to tell you what you want to hear to avoid conflict or to offer hope for a compromise. To Iranians, these practices are a part of good manners; they are not offended by them. But Americans and members of other English-speaking cultures are used to "straight talking," to saying directly and succinctly what they want. Therefore they find *taarof* hard to learn, let alone to practice. As an Iranian social scientist told the *New York Times* (August 6, 2006), "Speech has a different function than it does in the West"—in the West, "yes" generally means yes; in Iran, "yes" can mean yes, but it often means maybe or no. "This creates a rich, poetic linguistic culture," he said. "It creates a multidimensional culture where people are adept at picking up on nuances. On the other hand, it makes for bad political discourse. In political discourse people don't know what to trust."

You can see why critical thinking can help people avoid the tendency to stereotype and

to see cultural differences in communication solely in hostile, negative ways. "Why are the Iranians lying to me?" an American might ask. The answer is that they are not "lying" in Iranian terms; they are speaking in a way that is completely natural for them, according to their cultural rules for communication.

To learn the unspoken rules of a culture, you must look, listen, and observe. What is the pace of life like? Do people regard brash individuality and loud speech as admirable or embarrassing? When customers enter a shop, do they greet and chat with the shopkeeper or ignore the person as they browse? Are people expected to be direct in their speech or evasive? Sociocultural research enhances critical thinking by teaching us to appreciate the many cultural rules that govern people's behavior, values, attitudes, and ways of doing business. Before you write off someone from a culture different from your own as being rude, foolish, stubborn, or devious, consider other interpretations of that person's behavior—just as you would want that person to consider other, more forgiving, interpretations of yours.

Summary

((•—[**Listen** to an **audio file** of your chapter on **mypsychlab.com**

● *Social psychologists* study how social roles, attitudes, relationships, and groups influence individuals; *cultural psychologists* study the influence of culture on human behavior. Many cultural rules, such as those governing correct *conversational distance,* are unspoken but nonetheless powerful.

Roles and Rules

● The environment influences people in countless subtle ways; observing that others have broken rules or laws increases the likelihood that a passerby will do the same. Two classic studies illustrate the power of *norms* and *roles* to affect individual actions. In Milgram's obedience study, most people in the role of "teacher" inflicted what they thought was extreme shock on another person because of the authority of the experimenter. In the Stanford prison study, college students tended to behave in accordance with the role of "prisoner" or "guard" that they had been assigned.

● Obedience to authority contributes to the smooth running of society, but obedience can also lead to actions that are deadly, foolish, or illegal. People obey

orders because they can be punished if they do not, out of respect for authority, and to gain advantages. Even when they would rather not obey, they may do so because they have been *entrapped,* justifying each step and decision they make, and handing over responsibility for any harmful actions they commit to the authority.

Social Influences on Beliefs and Behavior

● Researchers in the area of *social cognition* study how people's perceptions affect their relationships and how the social environment affects their beliefs and perceptions. According to *attribution theory*, people are motivated to search for causes to which they can attribute their own and other people's behavior. Their attributions may be *situational* or *dispositional*. The *fundamental attribution error* occurs when people overestimate personality traits as a cause of behavior and underestimate the influence of the situation. A primary reason for the fundamental attribution error is that people rely on introspection to judge their own behavior but only have observation to judge the behavior of others.

● Attributions are further influenced by three *self-serving biases*: the bias to choose the most flattering and forgiving explanations of our own behavior; the bias that we are better, smarter, and kinder than others; and the bias that the world is fair (the *just-world hypothesis*).

● People hold many *attitudes* about people, things, and ideas. Attitudes may be *explicit* (conscious) or *implicit* (unconscious). Attitudes may change through experience, conscious decision, or as an effort to reduce *cognitive dissonance*. One powerful way to influence attitudes is by taking advantage of the *familiarity effect* and the *validity effect:* Simply exposing people repeatedly to a name or product makes them like it more, and repeating a statement over and over again makes it seem more believable.

● Many attitudes are acquired through learning and social influence, but some are associated with personality traits that have a genetic component. Religious and political affiliations are not heritable, but religiosity and certain political attitudes do have relatively high heritability. Ideological belief systems may have evolved to be organized along a left-right dimension, consisting of two central sets of attitudes: whether a person advocates or opposes social change, and whether a person thinks inequality is a result of human policies and can be overcome or is inevitable and should be accepted as part of the natural order. Attitudes are also profoundly affected by the *nonshared environment*, an individual's unique life experiences.

● Suicide bombers and terrorists have not been "brainwashed" and are not psychopaths. Most have been entrapped into taking increasingly violent actions against real and perceived enemies; encouraged to attribute all problems to that one enemy; offered a new identity and salvation; and cut off from access to dissonant information. These methods have been used to create religious and other cults as well.

Individuals in Groups

● The need to belong is so powerful that the pain of social rejection and exclusion is greater and more memorable than physical pain, which is why groups use the weapon of ostracism or rejection to enforce conformity.

● In groups, individuals often behave differently than they would on their own. Conformity permits the smooth running of society and allows people to feel in harmony with others like them. But as the Asch experiment showed, most people will conform to the judgments of others even when the others are plain wrong.

● Close-knit groups are vulnerable to *groupthink*, the tendency of group members to think alike, censor themselves, actively suppress disagreement, and feel that their decisions are invulnerable. Groupthink often produces faulty decisions because group members fail to seek disconfirming evidence for their ideas. However, groups can be structured to counteract groupthink.

● Sometimes a group's collective judgment is better than that of its individual members—the "wisdom of crowds." But crowds can also spread panic, rumor, and misinformation. *Diffusion of responsibility* in a group can lead to inaction on the part of individuals, as in *bystander apathy*. The diffusion of responsibility is likely to occur under conditions that promote *deindividuation*, the loss of awareness of one's individuality. Deindividuation increases when people feel anonymous, as in a large group or crowd or when they are wearing masks or uniforms. In some situations, crowd norms lead deindividuated people to behave aggressively, but in others, crowd norms foster helpfulness.

● The willingness to speak up for an unpopular opinion, blow the whistle on illegal practices, or help a stranger in trouble and perform other acts of *altruism* is partly a matter of personal belief and conscience. But several situational factors are also important: The person perceives that help is needed; cultural norms support taking action; the person has an ally; and the person becomes entrapped in a commitment to help or dissent.

Us Versus Them: Group Identity

● People develop *social identities* based on their ethnicity, nationality, religion, occupation, and other social memberships. In culturally diverse societies, many people face the problem of balancing their *ethnic identity* with *acculturation* into the larger society.

● *Ethnocentrism*, the belief that one's own ethnic group or religion is superior to all others, promotes "us–them" thinking. One effective strategy for reducing us–them thinking and hostility between groups is *interdependence,* having both sides work together to reach a common goal.

● *Stereotypes* help people rapidly process new information, organize experience, and predict how others will behave. But they distort reality by exaggerating differences between groups, underestimating the differences within groups, and producing selective perception.

Group Conflict and Prejudice

● A *prejudice* is an unreasonable negative feeling toward a category of people. Psychologically, prejudice wards off feelings of anxiety and doubt, bolsters self-esteem when a person feels threatened (by providing a scapegoat), and may alleviate the fear of death. Prejudice also has social causes: People acquire prejudices mindlessly, through conformity and parental lessons. Prejudice serves the cultural and national purpose of bonding people to their social groups and nations, and

in extreme cases justifying war. Finally, prejudice also serves to justify a majority group's economic interests and dominance. Thus, although *hostile sexism* is different from *benevolent sexism*, both legitimize gender discrimination. During times of economic insecurity and competition for jobs, prejudice rises.

● Psychologists disagree on whether racism and other prejudices are declining or have merely taken new forms. Some are trying to measure prejudice indirectly, by measuring *social distance;* seeing whether people are more likely to behave aggressively toward a target when they are stressed or angry; observing changes in the brain; or assessing unconscious positive or negative associations with a group, as with the *Implicit Association Test* (IAT). However, the IAT has many critics who claim it is not capturing true prejudice.

● Efforts to reduce prejudice need to target both the explicit and implicit attitudes that people have. Four conditions help to reduce two groups' mutual prejudices and conflicts: Both sides must have opportunities to work and socialize together informally and formally (the *contact hypothesis*); both sides must have equal legal status, economic standing, and power; both sides must have the legal, moral, and economic support of authorities and cultural institutions; and both sides must work together for a common goal.

Psychology in the News, Revisited

● Although many people believe that only bad or evil people do bad deeds, the principles of social and cultural psychology show that under certain conditions, good people often can be induced to do bad things too. Everyone is influenced to one degree or another by the social processes of obedience, entrapment, conformity, persuasion, bystander apathy, groupthink, deindividuation, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice.

Taking Psychology with You

● Sociocultural research enhances critical thinking by identifying the cultural rules that govern people's behavior, values, communication, and ways of doing business. Understanding these rules can help people examine their assumptions about people in other cultures, and avoid the tendency to jump to conclusions and reason emotionally about group differences.

Key Terms

- Social psychologists study how social roles, attitudes, relationships, and groups influence individuals.
- Cultural psychologists study the influence of culture on human behavior.

Roles and Rules

- **Norms**: rules that regulate social life, including explicit laws and implicit cultural conventions
- **Roles**: social positions that are regulated by norms about how people in those positions should behave
- Social roles are shaped by **culture**, a set of shared rules and values of a community or society.

Two Classic Studies

- In Milgram's obedience study, most people inflicted what they thought was extreme shock on another person because of the experimenter's authority.
- In Zimbardo's prison study, students quickly took on the role of "prisoner" or "guard."

Why People Obey

Several factors cause people to obey, including:
1. Unpleasant consequences for disobedience and benefits of obedience
2. Respect for the authority
3. Wanting to be polite or liked
4. **Entrapment**: increasing commitment to a course of action to justify one's investment in it
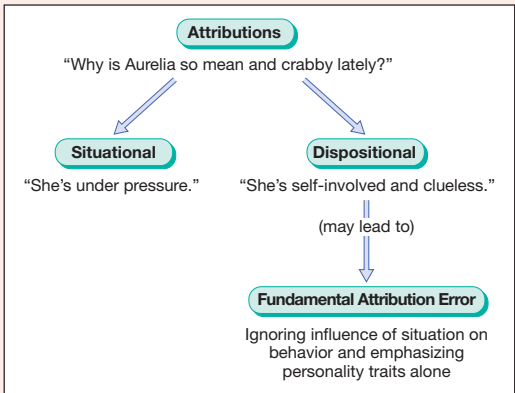5. Allocating responsibility to the authority

Social Influences on Beliefs and Behavior

Social cognition: how people's perceptions of themselves and others affect their relationships and how the social environment influences thoughts, beliefs, and values.

Attributions

Attribution theory holds that people explain their own and other people's behavior by attributing its causes to a *situation* or *disposition*.
- The **fundamental attribution error** is the tendency to ignore situational factors in favor of dispositional ones.

Attributions

"Why is Aurelia so mean and crabby lately?"

Situational — "She's under pressure."

Dispositional — "She's self-involved and clueless."

(may lead to)

Fundamental Attribution Error — Ignoring influence of situation on behavior and emphasizing personality traits alone

Three cognitive biases contribute to the fundamental attribution error:
- The bias to choose forgiving and flattering attributions for our own lapses
- The bias that we are better, smarter, and kinder than other people
- The bias to believe that the world is fair (the **just-world hypothesis**)

Attitudes

- Attitudes may be *implicit* (unconscious) or *explicit* (conscious).
- They may be altered because of the need to reduce **cognitive dissonance**.

Shifting Opinions vs. Bedrock Beliefs

- Efforts to get people to change their attitudes often rely on the **familiarity effect** and the **validity effect**.
- Some attitudes are highly heritable (e.g., religiosity and certain political views) and thus are resistant to change, but many are influenced by the nonshared environment.

Persuasion or "Brainwashing"

The example of suicide bombers illustrates common social-psychological factors involved in the making of a terrorist:
- The person is subjected to entrapment.
- The person's problems are explained by a simple attribution ("It's the fault of those bad people").
- The person is offered a new identity and salvation.
- The person's access to disconfirming information is severely controlled.

Individuals in Groups

Conformity

The Asch experiment shows that most people will conform to others' judgments, even when others are obviously wrong.

Groupthink

Groupthink, an extreme form of conformity, leads to faulty decisions because group members are vulnerable to:
• An illusion of invulnerability
• Self-censorship
• Pressure on dissenters to conform
• An illusion of unanimity

The Anonymous Crowd

When people are part of large, anonymous groups, two processes may occur:
1. **Diffusion of responsibility**, the spreading out of responsibility among many people. It can lead to *bystander apathy*.
2. **Deindividuation**, the loss of awareness of one's own individuality:
   — Increases as group gets larger
   — Increases when group members wear masks or uniforms
   — May increase helpfulness as well as destructiveness, depending on social norms

Altruism and Dissent

Situational factors can influence altruism and dissent, including:
• Perceiving that help is needed
• Norms that encourage action
• Having an ally
• Becoming entrapped in a commitment to help or dissent

Us Versus Them: Group Identity

Social identities are based on a person's identification with a nation, religion, political group, or other important affiliations.

Ethnic Identity

People often face the dilemma of balancing an **ethnic identity**, a close identification with a religious or ethnic group, and **acculturation**, identification with the dominant culture.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's own ethnic group or nation is superior to all others, can create "us–them" thinking and hostile competition.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes can be efficient cognitive summaries of other groups, but they distort reality by:
• Exaggerating differences between groups
• Producing selective perception
• Underestimating the differences within other groups

Group Conflict and Prejudice

A **prejudice** consists of a negative stereotype and a persistent, unreasonable negative feeling toward a category of people.

The Origins of Prejudice

1. Psychological causes: Prejudice wards off feelings of anxiety and doubt, simplifies complex problems, boosts self-esteem.
2. Social causes: Prejudice bonds people to their social group and nation.
3. Economic causes: Prejudice justifies a majority group's economic interests and legitimizes war.
4. Cultural and national: Prejudice bonds people to their own group and fosters the dehumanization of other groups.

Defining and Measuring Prejudice

• Prejudice is a challenge to define and measure; for example, "hostile sexism" is different from "benevolent sexism," though both legitimize gender discrimination.
• Psychologists disagree on whether racism and other prejudices are declining or have merely taken new forms.
• Some researchers are trying to measure prejudice indirectly:
— By studying *social distance*, a measure of people's reluctance to get close to another group
— By seeing whether people are more likely to behave aggressively toward a target when they are stressed or insulted
— By observing changes in the brain
— By assessing unconscious positive or negative associations with a group, as with the *Implicit Association Test* (IAT). However, the IAT has critics who claim it is not capturing true prejudice.

Reducing Conflict and Prejudice

Social psychologists have examined the conditions that decrease prejudice and animosity between groups:
1. Both sides must have opportunities to work and socialize together (the *contact hypothesis*).
2. Both sides must have equal legal status, economic standing, and power.
3. Both sides must have the moral, legal, and economic support of authorities and cultural institutions.
4. Both sides must work toward a common goal.