Welcome to

# Social Psychology Basics

written by

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# Introduction to Social Psychology


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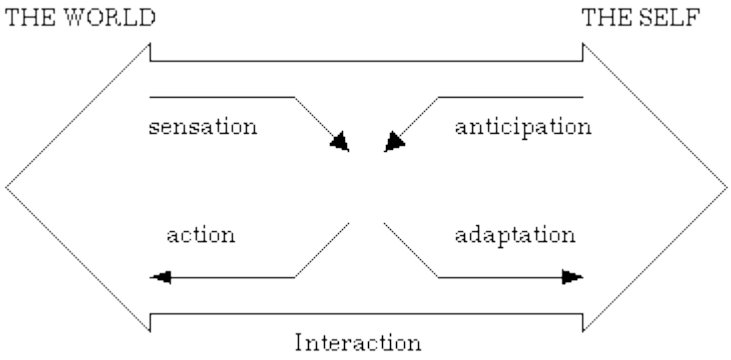
## Interaction

Kurt Lewin (an important influence on social psychology) once said "There's nothing so useful as a good theory." And, as long as you never lose sight of reality, it's quite true.

The problem in social psychology (and in psychology generally) is that there is no one agreed-upon theory! So, in order to give you something to help organize your ideas, I've pulled together a number of ideas into a theory for "in-the-meantime."

Basically, this theory looks at human experience as a matter of interaction between the world and the self. At its simplest, the world gives us events; we in turn give those events meaning by interpreting and acting upon them.

There are some obvious details here: sensations (input from the world, stimuli) and actions (output to the world, responses). There was a time when psychologists thought this was enough. Now we know better, and we add two more details, which I will call anticipation and adaptation.




Anticipation is a little difficult to explain. We have a certain knowledge of the world, a "model" of it. This model includes everything from little details like which shoe you put on first to complex things like how you feel about yourself and your life. We use this model to anticipate – expect, predict – what will happen in the next moment or in the next ten years.

If I close my eyes, I expect that when I open them you will still be there, the room will still be there, I will still be there, and so on. If all you of you were to disappear on me I would be seriously surprised.

If I keep my eyes closed and focus on the expectation, rather than on you and the world "out there," I can imagine you. We can understand images and thoughts as anticipations temporarily detached from the stream of events!

We also anticipate on a more long term basis: We have expectations about what college will and won't do for us, about love being forever, and the sun rising, and so on.

Adaptation is also more difficult to explain. Sometimes, we don't anticipate well. For example, you think you see a friend coming at you and you prepare to give a hearty "hi!" but just as you raise your arm to wave and begin to open your mouth, you realize it's not your friend at all but a complete stranger. (If possible, you convert the raised arm into a back-scratch, and the open mouth into a yawn. If it's too late and you've already said hi, just pretend you know them. This will drive them crazy.)

Whenever you make mistakes, you need to figure out what went wrong, what to do about it, how to make sense of it. As you do, you are improving your understanding of the world and your relation to it; you are improving your "model." This is adaptation. In our example, you may now have a model of the world that includes look-alikes, embarrassing mistakes, and a tendency to hold-off a little in the future before being so exuberant with your hello's. Adaptation is learning.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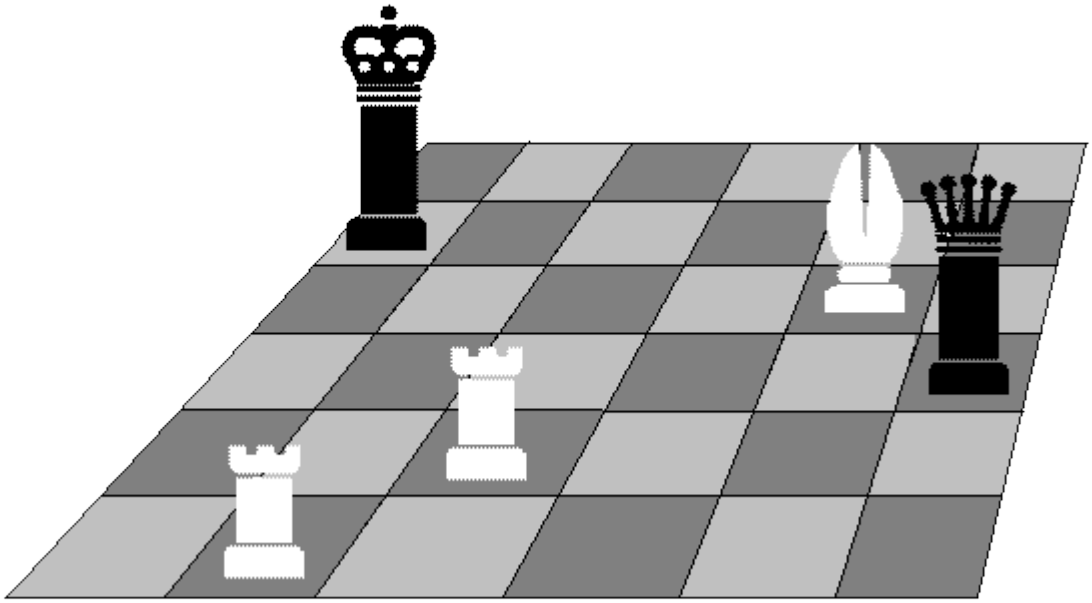
This additional layer to interaction of anticipation and adaptation is crucial: It means that our behaviors and experiences are not just a function of some common reality. We, ourselves, our understandings of reality, are inevitably and intrinsically a part of our behaviors and experiences. Without "self," reality would be meaningless.



Take a look at this drawing. An infant is likely to react to this by sticking pieces in his or her mouth. A young child may see them as little people or "finger-clickers." An adult who does not play chess may see them as chess pieces on a board. When asked what the two pieces in the foreground are, they might say they are castles. A beginning chess player would call them rooks, and might add that the white bishop can take the black queen (or vice versa). They "see" the moves of the pieces, the rules of the game. A good chess player might note that it is mate in one (or two) moves for black. None of these is wrong; they are simply different meanings applied to the same events.

You might ask: What is the event really? But what do you mean by that? "Really" to whom? Somebody must always do the seeing, give the meaning. A physical scientist looking at the pieces and noting their chemical compositions is still giving his or her meaning to the event.

Note, of course, that the "board" is 6 by 6 instead of 8 by 8, that there is no black king, which means there is no game going on, and that in fact this is a drawing – a set of lines – and not a set of three-dimensional objects at all. All of this is an indication of how much our interpretations add to what is "really" there.

So, in order to understand and predict and control people's experiences and behaviors, we have to understand the meanings they apply to reality. No easy trick.

## Social Interaction

All the preceding has been quite general and not particularly social. Well, among the events that we give meaning to are other people – very significant events. Often we treat people exactly as we treat other events: abusing them, ignoring them, taking them for granted.... You've all felt it, I'm sure: being treated like a thing instead of a person. But more often, I like to believe, we treat people as something more: We treat them as meaning-giving creatures like ourselves, as people. This is social interaction.

Think about what this means: I have to operate not only in my own "meaning system," but in yours as well, and you have to operate in mine. In order to deal with you, I have to know a little about your mind as well as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my own, and you have to know a little about mine. We recognize this every time we talk about "psyching each other out" or when we say "I see where you're coming from!"

If you like definitions, I must warn you that psychologists seldom agree on things. But if we can agree that psychology is the study of behavior and experience, then social psychology is the study of social behavior and experience. That is, it is the study of our behavior and experience when faced with other people.

I must add one more point in defining social psychology: Since we give the world meaning, we can give it social meaning when it suits us. This means we wind up engaging in social interaction in the absence of other people! We obey traffic signals (some of us) on empty streets in the middle of the night; we laugh or cry with characters in books or figures on a screen; we respond to the works of artists hundreds, even thousands of years dead.... In other words, social interaction includes behavior and experience in the implied or symbolic presence of others, as well as in their actual presence.

We could go on, adding and subtracting and rearranging words in the search for a perfect definition. Instead, let's move on and let the contents of the course do for a definition.

## Affect

So far, our theory is rather cold and mechanical. What about feelings? Well, they're there, to some degree, in every interaction.

Imagine this: In the middle of the night, you get a bad case of the mad munchies. So you leave your bed and head for the fridge. It's very dark, but you know your apartment like the back of your hand, so you don't bother with the lights. The coffee table is in the middle of the room and you anticipate its presence and maneuver around it. Perhaps you reach out your hand to touch the edge to confirm your anticipation. You're almost there – five more feet to the fridge – when WHAM! you walk into a solid six foot...something: The unanticipated!

What do you feel at that moment? Perhaps fear, surprise, perhaps sheer terror. Whatever it is, it is rather unpleasant. Let's call it distress.

You are, at the same time, busy "generating anticipations" – making guesses about the nature of the beast, taking actions that might alleviate some of your fears, dashing for the light switch. The lights come on... you're expecting a sex-crazed psycho-killer....

And lo and behold, it's the fridge. You cleaned behind it for the first time in 30 years and left it pulled out. Now how do you feel?

Perhaps you feel relief, a sensation of pleasant resolution. You heave a great sigh, perhaps laugh. Things make sense again. Life is on the right path again. Let's call it delight.

(Note that you might still feel some negative emotion as well, as soon as the initial relief is behind you – like annoyance at your own stupidity. That problem has yet to be resolved!)

Another example: Notice the people coming off one of the "sooper-dooper" roller coasters. Notice their frozen smiles. That's their way of saying "yes! I am alive!"

Let's be more precise: When interaction is problematic, we feel distress. For example, (1) when we fail to anticipate something – like the fridge in our face – we are distressed.

We also feel distress when (2) we anticipate more than one thing at the same time: conflicting anticipations. Which of your roommates is actually the chain-saw killer? Each time you are alone with one of them, you don't know whether to feel secure or to run like the blazes.

And (3) we also feel it when we are faced by general uncertainty: Which way is that cockroach, or rat, or snake going to move next? Perhaps this is the root of our common phobias of these delightful creatures.


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Distress can be mild, an irritation or annoyance: When your pen runs out of ink just as you sign a check at the local supermarket.

It can be a bit more intense: The frustration of you car breaking down; the fear as your car careens out of control on the highway; the disgust you feel when you discover that your lover bites the heads off of live chickens.

Delight is the resolution of our distressful problems. We are, actually, developing or elaborating our understanding of the world when we feel delight. Delight is the emotional side of adaptation, of (believe it or not!) learning.

It too can be mild: The pleasant feeling of finishing a crossword puzzle or winning at a game or sport. Or it can be a bit more intense, like the relief you feel when you realize that the roller-coaster only felt like it was leaving the tracks; or the joy of scientific discovery, artistic creation, or mystical experience.

Notice that since solving problems requires having problems, delight depends on distress. Even physical pleasure seems to work like this: You enjoy it more after doing without it for a while, whether "it" is food, drink, or sex! Too much of it, and it doesn't seem to satisfy quite so well. (Note that our response to this is often to try doing it even more! Hence some of our neurotic attitudes towards sex, food, gambling, attention....)

Facing a problem doesn't cause distress – it is distress. The distress is just the feeling-side of the situation. The same points apply to delight. It isn't caused by problem-resolution, it is problem-resolution. And distress and delight don't cause you to seek a solution; they are not "motivating forces."

But there's no doubt that the situations in which you feel distress may be ones that you avoid in the future. Or, if they resulted in delight, they may be ones you seek out in the future. It is the anticipation of distress or delight that is motivating.

Anxiety is the distressful anticipation of distress. From experience, you expect that the situation before you will be unpleasant. This expectation is itself unpleasant: it conflicts with your desire to be a happy, carefree individual. And, often, you try to avoid the situation.

Hope is the delightful anticipation of delight. From experience, the problem before you will be resolved, and this is a happy thought. Depending on details, we could also call this eagerness, or even anxiety, as in "I'm anxious to get started!"

Now, the "basic" distress and delight don't usually happen at the same time –since one is the problem and the other the solution. But anticipatory distress and delight – that is, anxiety and hope – often happen at the same time: We call this "mixed emotions."

Skimming across deep water on little sticks at 30 miles per hour can make you nervous; water-skiing, on the other hand, sounds like fun. You feel both anxiety and eagerness. You decision whether to try it will be based on how these two balance out for you. Notice I said "for you." The decision is very much a subjective one, based on what makes you anxious and eager.

Anticipation can also help us make sense of other emotions, like this:

Anger is distress with an expectation of external change. The problem is "out there" and anger is the build-up of energy needed to solve it. Just try to hold back a baby from crawling, and see what you get.

Sadness is distress with an expectation of internal change. The problem is "in here." I realize that I must adapt to it. Grief is the most obvious example: You can't get them back; you can only learn to live with their absence. Many of our major learning experiences involve sadness, such as coming to understand our own limitations, or the limitations of our loved ones, for example.

Notice that anger is a little more hopeful; sadness is a little harder to take. People tend to be angry at things before they settle down to accept what they can't change. That says something very important about us: We resist major changes in the self; if we can, we try to make the world fit our expectations.


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Sometimes people persist in these emotional states. A person who is always trying to make the world – especially others – fit his expectations we call aggressive, and his emotional state hostile. Often, what he really needs to do is change himself, adapt. But for some reason – his culture, for example – giving-in is taboo. Like physical pleasures, when it doesn't work right, we do what we always do, only more!

Likewise, a person who is always trying to make himself fit the world – and especially others' expectations – we call compliant and his emotional state is commonly depressed. He is always trying to adjust himself to others, when often what he needs is to get angry.

In our society, we see some differences between men and women in this area: Men have typically been taught from childhood on that giving-in is bad; women have been taught that being pushy is bad. So men are more likely to get stuck in aggressive patterns, and women in compliant patterns. Of course, it doesn't have to be this way, and often enough it's reversed. But ideally, we should all, men and women alike, "give-in" when that makes sense, and be "pushy" when that makes sense!

Most common of all is avoidance: When we see a problem coming, we give in to our anxiety and run away, physically or psychologically. With avoidance, we are really trying to get out of an emotional situation and back into a peaceful state. Unfortunately, if you avoid problems and their distress, you also avoid the delight of solutions. Think of some of the common "psychological" ways we avoid life's problems: Alcohol, drugs, television. The goal of avoidance is to be unconscious, or at least unconscious of problems.

These three "types" – aggressive, compliant, and avoiding – are so common that a number of theorists have independently come up with them (Adler, Horney, Fromm, and others). These types may even have a genetic component to them, so that some of us are more likely to deal with our problems by turning to aggression, others with compliance, still others with avoidance.

A more mature person tends to take on problems with an eye towards their solution: They face distress and anxiety with hope and eagerness.

This takes a little something –an ability to focus on your goals, and to ignore the pains of getting there. This has been called will-power, self-discipline, need for achievement, and delay-of-gratification. I just call it will. We will come back to this idea later.

## Motivation

In this section, we move from questions about what we feel to questions about what we want. As I said earlier, the "self" is what gives things their meaning. Some philosophers and psychologists suggest that the only thing that makes a person (or any living creature) different from a mechanical device is that a person gives things meaning.

We give things meaning because we have desires. Because of desire, some things have value to us, and some don't; some are relevant to us, some are not; and value or relevance is just another way of talking about meaning.

Behaviorists and other theorists who take a fairly biological approach to social psychology suggest that our desires all boil down to the desire to survive. So our most fundamental needs are for food, water, rest, and the avoidance of pain. More complex motivations are seen as derived from these by learning.

Freudians have a similar view, and refer to desire as libido. They, however, focus more on the need to survive beyond the individual's life-span through reproduction. Since the survival of all needs and the instincts that serve them in fact depends on reproduction, it is quite reasonable to make sex the key desire!

Humanists use the word actualization, which means "the desire to maintain and enhance the self." So "maintenance" certainly includes survival, as long as it is understood that we are referring to the survival of the psychological self as well as the physical self. And "enhancement" means we do more than just try to survive.


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For example, most "lower" animals react to problems and learn from their mistakes. But "higher" animals have certain extra desires – such as curiosity – that encourage them to learn about potential problems before any serious mistakes happen. Kittens and puppies and human children are notorious for this kind of "enhancement." It is sometimes referred to as competence motivation.

Social creatures such as ourselves rely on each other for much of their "maintenance and enhancement." One thing we need, especially early in our lives, is positive regard, meaning attention, affection, etc. At first, it's a matter of physical survival; later in life, it's a sign that we have support around us.

Human beings take this need a step further: Because we have an internal mental life (thanks to anticipation, etc.), we can internalize both the need we have for positive regard and its satisfaction or non-satisfaction. In other words, we have a desire and need for positive self-regard, also known as self-respect, self-worth, or self-esteem.

Poor self-esteem – the inferiority complex – is one of the most common sources for psychological problems a therapist finds. Most of us have these complexes about one thing or another: looks, intelligence, strength, social skills, etc. Even the bully , the beauty, and the braggart – people with superiority complexes – can be understood as people with poor self-esteem!

I would like to suggest that all these motivations are real and relevant to understanding people. And we can differ with each other in regards to what motivates each of us: Some of us "live to eat;" others are "sex fiends;" others are curious to a fault; others are "people people;" and others still are driven by ego; and so on!

## "Inertia"

Another aspect of motivation that is hard to overestimate, and yet is rarely discussed at all, is "inertia." If you think about it, nearly all of the things we've been talking about involve returning to a unstressed state. When we talk about physical needs, for example, we often talk about homeostasis: like a thermostat that controls a furnace, we eat when we are low on nutrients, we stop eating when we have enough.

The same thing applies to psychological phenomena: When our understanding of things is lacking and we fail to anticipate, we scramble to improve our understanding; once we understand something, and our anticipations are right on target, we are satisfied. In fact, it almost seems that we spend our lives trying to be unconscious! After all, we feel distress when things go wrong and delight when things improve, but neither when things are going just right.

Things that are thoroughly learned are unconscious. Concerning small behaviors, we call them habits. Brushing your teeth, for example: Odds are that you brush them in pretty much the same way every day, as if you were playing-out a program.

When they concern social behaviors, we call them rituals. Coronations, marriage ceremonies, funerals, standing on line, taking turns when talking, saying "hello, how are you," whether you want to know or not – all are examples of rituals.

There are also ways of thinking and perceiving that are so thoroughly learned we tend not to be conscious of them: attitudes, mind-sets, norms, prejudices, defenses, and so on.

The key to identifying habits and rituals is that the acts are essentially emotionless (hence unconscious). Mind you, things "around" the habit or ritual may be emotional (i.e. a funeral!), but the things done are done rather automatically – like driving a car, once you've caught on – until things go wrong!

When that happens, you experience some kind of distress. Go ahead, tell someone who asks "how are you" all about how you really are! Or stand the wrong way in an elevator. Or interrupt the smooth flow of a restaurant (e.g. by taking peoples' orders, "to help out"). This is called Garfinkling, after Harold Garfinkle, who invented it. It will reveal rules of behavior that are so ritualized that we've forgotten they exist.

Anyway, maintaining things the way they are, keeping social "law and order," is an extremely powerful motivation. In its most positive form, it's our desire for peace and contentment. In its most negative form, it


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is our resistance to anything new or different.

## Higher motivations

At the other end of the spectrum are what we might call higher motivations, such as creativity and compassion.

There are times when we are, for a moment, "transported outside ourselves," or, to put it another way, when we feel an identity with something greater than ourselves. Many people experience these moments when they stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon for the first time, or walk into one of the great cathedrals of Europe for the first time. The ocean, the acropolis, sequoias, hummingbirds, music, even a great book or movie can do this as well. We could call it a peak, spiritual, or mystical experience, or just call it awe.

This kind of thing also happens with certain behaviors. Mountain climbers talk about the flow experience (see Czentimihalyi), when their minds are fully occupied with the task at hand and they become "one with the mountain." Dancers, actors, musicians, and athletes mention similar experiences of involvement.

Creative activities can also give us these feelings. Artists, musicians, writers, scientists, and crafts people talk about a point at which their are led by their creation, rather than the other way around.

And we feel it when we truly love someone, when they become more important than ourselves. Albert Schweitzer said that only those who serve can be truly happy. This is called compassion.

In all these examples, we see not just "maintenance and enhancement of self" but a transcendence of self, a loss of self that paradoxically leads to an expansion of self. Most religions and philosophies make these their highest values.

## Freedom

There is something very peculiar about people: While, from an outside view, it may seem as if our behaviors were being completely determined by the various forces that bear down on us – genetics, the physical world, social pressures – we seem to be capable of "pulling back" now and then, for a moment or two, from the stream of events. We can pause to reflect on things. And we can imagine and think about things that aren't immediately present.

For example: Sometimes one part of us – say our inherited physiology – wants sexual gratification, and wants it now. Another part of us – say our social upbringing – wants respect, safety, virtue, affection, or whatever. If we were completely determined, we would simply go with the stronger force, and life would be easy. Instead, we have the ability to weigh the forces.

Sometimes this is a less-than-fully conscious process. We can weigh two forces emotionally, in terms of the relative anxiety and eagerness. But we can step back a bit and add certain rational considerations, and consider things like the meaning of sin, the odds of getting caught, or whether the urge will go away if you ignore it. Worrying about things this way may be unpleasant, but it is a sign of our freedom to choose!

We can also create new options. Only people deal in possibilities as well as realities! When things seem to be a matter of either-or, damned if you do and damned if you don't, we can pause, and reflect, and create a third – or fourth, or fifth... – choice.

Even when alternatives seem totally absent, some freedom remains. The writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, after being faced with Gestapo torture, discovered that he could always say no! You at very least have a choice of the attitude you will take towards your suffering, hard though it may be.

All this is very frustrating to anyone looking for a hard science of social psychology. Much of the time we are as determined as falling bricks. But at our best, we don't follow "laws of human behavior" – we create ourselves!


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# Person Perception


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## Mental Structures

The basic building blocks of meaning we could call contrasts: we cut up the world into little pieces, we separate this from that, we make differentiations. There are many other names we could use: constructs, concepts, percepts, categories, dimensions, and so on, all with slightly differing meanings. But they all ultimately refer to this process of making one into two: more or less; it's this or it's that; there are two kinds of people in the world; it's them or us; it's got to be one or the other; it's black or white; please answer, yes or no; what goes up must come down.

Most of the time, we use only one end or the other of a contrast at a time. These ends are called characteristics or, especially in reference to the characteristics of people, traits. But the other end is always there, lurking in the background. You can't have one without the other – good without bad, up without down, fat without thin...

Please note that these contrast need not be verbal: My cat knows the difference between the expensive cat food and the cheap stuff, yet can't tell you about it; an infant contrasts between mommy and non-mommy; wild animals contrast safe areas and dangerous ones, etc. Even adult humans sometimes "just know" without being about to say – unconscious contrasts, if you like: what is it about that person that you like or dislike?

Contrasts don't just float around independently, either. We interrelate and organize them. For example, we can define a category: "Women are adult female human beings." Or we can go a step further and organize things into taxonomies, those tree-like structures we come across in biology: A Siamese is a kind of cat, which is a kind of carnivore, which is a kind of mammal, which is a kind of vertebrate....

Or we can put contrasts into more temporal structures, like rules. These are often called schemas or scripts. You can find explicit examples in books about card games, etiquette, or grammar; but you know quite a few rule systems yourself, even if they have become so automatic as to be unconscious!

Not all organization of contrasts are so tightly structured. We can describe something: "Women are delicate." As the example is intended to suggest, descriptions, as opposed to definitions, need not be true! Beliefs are similar to, but looser than, taxonomies. Whereas birds definitely (i.e. by definition) are vertebrates and have feathers, it is only my belief that they all fly – I could be wrong! Stereotypes are examples of beliefs; so are opinions. But some beliefs are so strongly held that we see them as definite.

There are also narratives – the stories we have in our minds. These are temporal, like rules, but are amazingly flexible. They can be a matter of remembered personal experiences, or memorized history lessons, or pure fiction. I have a suspicion that these contribute greatly to our sense of identity, and that animals don't have them to the degree we do.

## Generativity

One lovely thing we can do with the verbal contrasts and characteristics is describe a person to someone – i.e. give a list of traits. We then begin to deal with them socially before we actually meet them! They, in fact, could be long dead, and yet we can get to know them somewhat. Each word or phrase we give or hear narrows the range of possible expectations a little more. He's male? So what. He's male, 40-ish, chubby, a professor of psychology... Oh, I know who you mean. The more that is said, the more precise the anticipations.

In linguistics, it is said that language is generative. That means that, with a small set of words and a small set of rules of grammar, you can create (generate) a potentially infinite set of meaningful sentences. Well, this generativity is characteristic of all human activity. This means that, no matter how many contrasts you can relate about a chubby professor or whatever, there are still an infinite number of possible characteristics or behaviors that the 40-ish professor can generate. That professor, in other words, can still surprise you!

Since we are still "built" to try to anticipate him, we try one more thing: We try to anticipate others by putting ourselves into our anticipations! We make the assumption that they will do what we would do if we


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were in their situation and in the kinds of pigeon-holes we have placed them in. I call this "the assumption of empathic understanding."

This seems to be such a strong tendency in human beings that we often do it when we are trying to anticipate non-human beings and things. We tend to be anthropomorphic in our dealings with animals, for example. I tend to see my cat as being manipulative, Machiavellian, even sociopathic when, in fact, she doesn't have the I.Q. of a bean sprout. We even attribute "souls" to non-living things, which is called animism. So our ancestors attempted to appease angry volcanoes, or give thanks for the generosity of the earth, and so on.

When all else fails, we expect others to be like us.

## Interaction of traits

Some of the preceding makes people sound rather computerish – all orderly and neat. For better or for worse, however, there is nothing terribly neat about our use of traits. Trait meanings can vary quite a bit, depending on the context they, and we, are in. Traits vary, for example, in the presence of other traits.

The original research on this involved giving people lists of trait adjectives, as if we were describing a blind-date: "He's cute, has a good personality, works at the mall, drives a 'vette..."

For example, try to imagine this person:

cold, handsome, intelligent, concerned.

Compare your image with this person:

warm, handsome, intelligent, concerned.

If I asked you for details, you might have some like mine: Number one is a physicist, looks a bit like James Bond, and is concerned about the disposal of nuclear waste; Number two is a psychologist, is the "cute" kind of handsome, and is concerned with the emotional welfare of young children.

Some traits – called central traits – are "heavier" than others, that is, are responsible for more alteration in other traits while tending to remain relatively untouched themselves. Warm-cold is an example. Or try imagining this person:

strong, tough, cold, athletic, and...female.

What happened? Well, we all know strong, tough, cold, athletic women; but male-female is a very strong contrast and influences our interpretation of other traits dramatically.

It also seems that the first traits we hear have the greatest effects. Try this one:

popular, friendly, warm, ugly.

And compare it with this one:

ugly, warm, friendly, popular..

In the second example, you more easily adapted the following words to the prime one (ugly), whereas in the first, your stereotypes had you imagining a fairly attractive person.

Note that these things don't just happen when we describe someone with a list of trait adjectives. They happen as we piece together our impressions of a real person right in front of us! And so our last example is also the way "first impressions" happen. And first impressions do, indeed, have a large impact.

Put first impressions together with the heaviest contrast of all – good-bad – and you have what is called the halo effect: If we quickly evaluate a person as good, everything afterwards will be seen with a "halo" around it... this person can do no wrong! If we see them as bad, the halo becomes horns, hoofs, and a pointy tail, and even possible positive traits are interpreted negatively!


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## Inferences

As I said earlier, contrasts don't just float around loose. They are organized to some degree. This means that we can make inferences from one characteristic to another. Usually, this means going from a fairly obvious characteristic to one that is more "abstract," hidden, or uncertain. For example, when you see a person in a lab coat with a stethoscope around her neck and a certain kind of diploma on the wall, you might infer that this person is a physician. Or if you see someone being rude to someone else, you might infer that she is obnoxious, that is, has some inner trait that will lead her to be rude in other situations and might involve other behaviors as well.

Note that some of our inferences are more a matter of definitions, and others are more a matter of beliefs. Certain college degrees, for example, are crucial to who is or isn't a doctor; their manner of dress, or their bedside manners, might be important, but are not crucial.

There are several different bases for the inferences we make:

(1) A smile is usually correctly understood as an indication of happiness because smiles seem to be a part of our biology. There is no culture in the world that does not understand the smile, though many misuse and pervert that understanding.

(2) "The finger" is understood, in our culture, as an indication of contempt, because it is a part of our cultural communications system. Language, gestures, clothing, social ritual, occupation, and much of body language is cultural.

(3) Being female has been, in our culture, traditionally assumed to imply poor mechanical ability. This assumption, of course, has lead parents to discourage the development of mechanical abilities in their daughters: Why bother? The inference is, therefore, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The expectation creates itself!

(4) Finally, many of our inferences don't really work at all. They are perpetuated because we often ignore or deny contradictions – perhaps they are threatening to us – or the contradictions simply don't show up well, as when we have little contact with some category of people. We could call these superstitious inferences.

# Inferences from Appearance

Probably the simplest inferences we can make begin with the appearance of the person before us. As you'll see, there is a good deal of superstition here, but also some inferences well rooted in biology.

## Facial expression of emotion

First, we tend to infer emotion from facial expressions. Charles Darwin noted that animals as well as people communicate emotion through facial expression, and that certain expressions appear to be universal among human beings: Smiling is a sign of happiness and warmth towards another; crying is a sign of sadness; the frown with down-turned eye-brows is a sign of anger.

Laughter, too, is universal, but it is a more complex thing: It may signify happiness, yet if someone greeted you by laughing, you would feel funny–laughter can be very hostile, as when we find someone's misfortunes amusing. In other words, laughter reflects interpersonal tension and tension-release, such as when we conclude that we are not afraid of the stranger (that silly clown!) after all.

Anthropologists have noted these and other expressions even in cultures that had had no previous contact with the mainstream of world cultures.

Not only the expressions but the inferences we make from the expressions may be built-in. Notice how we tend to smile when someone smiles, or cry when they cry. Even babies do that! It's called "social contagion," and may explain the sometimes terrifying behavior of mobs.


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But notice that some expressions are culture-bound, such as the single raised eye-brow (signifying wry amusement in our culture) or the tongue pushing out the cheek (signifying sexual interest in Latin America).

And further, we can manipulate even our natural expressions. All the European cultures use facial expressions willfully and in exaggerated fashion. Other cultures, notably the Japanese, suppress some expressions and use stereotypical versions of others. Only a few cultures, such as the Polynesians', tend to express their feelings fairly directly and honestly.

Finally, of course, no matter what your natural feelings or your cultural adaptations, you can lie with your facial expressions. It takes a good eye to catch the minute differences between a well-acted emotion and the real thing!

## Facial structure

It is perhaps the biological bases of facial expressions that leads us to make further inferences based on facial structures: A blockhead is honest but dumb, a weak chin means a weak personality, a high brow means great intelligence, a low brow means coarse or vulgar tastes, beady eyes means sneakiness, a prune-face suggests a prude, and so on.

Most of these are superstitious or even bigoted: Some derive from the supposed characteristics of certain ethnic groups and their supposed similarity to certain animals (English stereotypes of Irish people, for example – they all look like leprechauns, don't they now?) Some – the prune face or beauty-pageant smiles, for example – are the results of habitual expressions of disgust or sociability. Beware of how you hold your face: It may stay that way!

## The body

And if your face can tell something about you, why not your body? William Sheldon even developed a theory (with some supportive research) that connected body types with personality types: To exaggerate, thin people (ectomorphs) are neurotic (cerebrotonic), muscular people (mesomorphs) are jocks (somatotonic), and fat people (endomorphs) are jolly (viscerotonic). Sheldon maintained that there really is a biological (or, more precisely, an embryological) connection.

But it could also be a matter of self-fulfilling prophecy: The broad-shouldered boy gets pushed into football by his over-zealous father, or the lonely chubby girl makes jokes at her own expense in order to make friends.

## Clothing

Fortunately, we cover our bodies with clothing. (I've been to nude beaches and they are not a pretty sight!) And this gives us another opportunity for making inferences. Obviously, there's nothing biological here. First, it is a great opportunity for communicating about oneself, consciously and unconsciously. It is a way of expressing ourselves.

Sometimes, the communication is very direct: you can wear a t-shirt with a political slogan or favorite band on it, for example, or wear a cross, or a star of David, or yin-yang, or peace sign.

But generally, in order to communicate, we need to rely on our cultures' stereotypes. Otherwise, how would others know what kind of statement we are trying to make? This is another example of the effect of context on person perception.

For example, if one dresses sloppily (relative to the norms of your society), that might suggests to people in one culture that one is lazy. In another culture, it might suggest that the person is interested in higher things. In a third, it might suggest that the person is relaxed and comfortable. In a fourth, it might mean you are uncouth....


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Within a culture, sloppy may mean good things at a family barbecue, and bad things at uncle Joe's funeral!

A curious point: If you dress "conventionally" (for whatever place and time you are in), people will trust you more! Deviation in dress suggests deviation in other matters as well.

Actually, you needn't move from one culture to another. You can stay in one place and just wait a few years: The styles will change. In the 1950's lipstick meant liberal; in the 1960's, it meant conservative. Today...I don't know. Glasses used to mean smart, reliable, industrious (frequent reading may have led to this stereotype!); today, with the availability of contacts, glasses are simply a choice.

Again notice that we can lie with clothes, even more easily than with our facial expressions. We can, for example, "dress for success," or at least for an interview.

Please notice that these inferences are not necessarily from the obvious to the less visible – we can work them backwards, too. For example, what does a librarian look like? Forgive me my stereotypes, but I picture a woman (despite the many male librarians I've met), a bit older, dressed in a conservative suit (tweed, even), dark stockings, sensible shoes, hair in a bun, and glasses with one of those little gold chains. I'm ashamed of myself, but there is in fact a little of the self-fulfilling prophecy at work here: Someone who wants to be a librarian, identifies with the profession, may in fact tend to dress in keeping with the stereotype and thereby promote it!

## Attractiveness

The strongest effect of face and body is the overall characteristic of attractiveness. We tend to see pretty people as being nicer, smarter, even morally better – we like them more. This has held up under the research: for example, psychologists found that teachers preferred and expected more from the pretty kids and less from the unattractive ones. They even made excuses when the attractive ones didn't meet up with their expectations!

I should note that the longer you know someone, the less important their attractiveness becomes. And also note that there are plenty of exceptions to the rules when it comes to making inferences from attractiveness– note the "dumb blonde" stereotype. And finally, don't forget that beauty is in the eye of the beholder – it is very subjective and (beauty pageants to the contrary) impossible to measure!

## Speech

Along with appearance we can include how you sound. We can make quite a few inferences from the sound of your voice, and not too inaccurately, either. For example, we can infer social class. In England, for example, we can easily tell the upper class dialects of Brideshead Revisited from the lower class dialects of Upstairs Downstairs.

This isn't restricted to England by any means, though. On Long Island, for example, you can hear a range of class dialects running from "Long Island Lockjaw," named for the way its speakers keep their teeth together when they speak, to the working class dialects famous for their "Jeet yet?" and "Watcha doon?"

We can also tell people's origins. Australians ("Ozzies"), for example, stand out when they speak "Strilian" and wish you a "G'die mite." Likewise, we can tell Americans from Brits, Scotsmen from Englishmen, and Liverpudlians from Londoners. We can even tell which part of London a person is from. Only a "Cockney" Londoner, for example, would say "vewwy li'oo" for "very little."

How we deal with r's alone can tell a lot: If American news anchors pronounce "fire" with a light r, central Pennsylvanians say "fiyur," with a strong r, and Oklahomans say "fahrr," New Yorkers say "fiyuh," and aristocratic Brits say "faah." In Massachusetts, an r changes a preceding a: "a nice caah." And Rhode Islanders drop nearly all r's: "thwee nice caahs."

Words may differ in different dialects. The plural for you is a good example: Many Americans say "you


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guys." New Yorkers often say "youse" and even "youse guys." Southerners say "you-all" or "y'all." And in Appalachia they say "you-uns."

In Pennsylvania, you can practically tell what county someone is from on the basis of a few sentences: If you're from Lancaster (pronounced Lancster), you might say "the lawn needs mowed," "the peanut butter is all," or "outen the light." On the other hand, if you're from Huntingdon, you might say "leave him go" or "I left the dog out," "you-uns comin'?" or even "thar she be! Thar be yer woman!"

Generally, city dialects are loose, open, fast, and loud. Country dialects are slow and drawled. Upper class dialects tend to be tenser, more precise, and rather clipped. Surprisingly, this pattern holds well even cross-culturally!

Some dialects have different speech patterns for men and women! Japanese is notorious for this, with different pronunciations, grammatical structures, and even words for each gender. But they are not alone: Haven't you ever noticed that certain words (naughty ones) are spoken much more frequently by men? Or that women tend to speak in a more roundabout, less confrontational, fashion? And in Oklahoma there are even phonetic differences: men will say "thenk yuh," while women tend to say "think yuu."

We also infer emotion, especially anxiety, from the pitch of your voice, the stop-gaps you use (umm, and uh, you know...), stuttering and so on, with some accuracy. When the pitch of your voice begins to rise, it's not a bad bet that you're lying! A loud person is usually pegged as an extravert; a quiet one as an introvert.

And last, there are those very stereotyped inferences that have been perpetuated in movies and the like: A high pitched voice suggests that you are small (with some logic) and good (hi there, Minnie, heh heh!); a low pitched voice suggests you are large (usually true) and bad (I AM your father!). And so on.

## Inferences from Acts

Although facial expressions are commonly thought of as momentary things, things you can capture in a photograph, in fact they take some time to accomplish. Research that suggests that we are not very good at interpreting facial expressions often ignores that fact, using only still photographs of people. As you should understand by now, everything in social psychology involves context, including the context of complete movements.

There are, then, quite a few inferences we make that begin with acts.

### Gestures

Perhaps the most obvious are gestures, often called emblems in social psychology. They are mostly cultural devices that communicate in much the same way that words do.

The simplest are movements of intention, that is, the very beginnings of an action that come to stand for the whole thing, like when your date keeps making motions toward the door.

Examples are plentiful: When we greet someone with our arms outstretched, that's a sign that we want to hug and perhaps make nice. If we greet someone with our fists clenched, that might mean something else. If we put our hands or arms over or in front of our heads, that suggests self-protection, and may be used to indicate that you've had enough and can't take any more.

The most universal movement of intention is pointing. Pointing derives from the act of reaching for something. Mind you, some cultures point with the entire hand. Others may point with the chin or even with the tongue.

While some movements are, like pointing, fairly universal, many are specific to each culture, such as placing ones hands on one's cheeks to suggest upset or placing hands together under one cheek to suggest the need to sleep.


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Most gestures seem pretty arbitrary, like words: If "bow-wow" might be a sensible thing to call a dog, the word "dog" is just traditional. A good example of an arbitrary gesture is the "thumbs up" gesture, indicating approval, which comes to us from the ancient Romans.

There are other gestures of approval: In all cultures, movements like clapping, snapping fingers, and stomping feet are used as applause. A famous European gesture of approval is the "pursed hand," where all the fingers of one hand are brought together and pointed up. Some say this comes from the act of feeling material in the market place for its quality. It is also used to indicate something is very fine, small, or precise, and can be used to say "listen to me, this is exactly what I mean to say." We can kiss our fingertips and say "magnifique!" Or we can touch only our index finger and thumb, and say "okay!" Be careful though: that gesture may also mean zero or certain orifices!

We are superstitious creatures, and so have many gestures of protection: We cross our fingers (a cross? or some ancient symbol for lovers?); we point our index finger and pinky at someone to protect ourselves from the evil eye; we cover our mouths when we yawn (to keep our souls from escaping).

We also use gestures to communicate on the sly: We can pull our lower eyelid with our index finger, or form a circle around our eye, to tell our friends to be alert and take a look. We can touch or pull our earlobe, to say "listen up!" We can tap or rub the side of our nose, to say "I smell trouble!"

Some of these gestures pertain to matters of sex: The "fig," the thumb sticking between the index and middle fingers, is a symbol for the female genitalia, and is used in some places to indicate sexual interest. So are gestures like pushing out one's cheek with one's tongue, or the hand purse and okay sign (which suggests another explanation of their origin!)

Some gestures express hostility: Flicking ones chin or teeth, or biting one's thumb, expresses disinterest or contempt. Thumbing one's nose expresses mockery ("I make a long nose at you!"). Holding up the index and little fingers suggests that the person to whom it is directed is a cuckold. (This is the origin of "bunny ears.") Dropping one's pants while facing away from someone ("mooning") is experiencing a resurgence of popularity.

The examples I've been using are of European origin. There are gestural "languages" for every region of the world. In Islamic countries, for example, showing the bottom of the foot is the primary gesture of contempt. This is difficult for Americans, who are prone to cross their legs and thus insult their Islamic hosts.

One set of gestures is particularly intriguing to the psychologist: gestures of sexual hostility. The most famous is, of course, the "finger." It represents the penis, and says, essentially, "I wish sexual aggression upon your person." We can emphasize the message by using the entire forearm (popular in Italy) or by using two fingers instead of one (popular in England). In Australia, the thumb, jerked upward, is a common substitute, once used inadvertently by former president Bush on a visit.

This last example shows how dangerous gestures can be in cross cultural situations: In Greece and Turkey, that same backhanded "v" is used as a victory sign, adapted from Churchill's original forehanded "v" because, in Greece and Turkey, the forehanded "v" is the obscene gesture, going back to ancient Constantinople, where people would push excrement into criminal's faces as they were paraded through the streets.

On a more positive note, their are gestures of greetings, love, and friendship: The kiss and the hug are the most universal. But note the enormous number of variations, with their different meanings in different cultures. Does one kiss one's host or hostess on the hand, the cheek, or the mouth? If the cheek, does one kiss the left or the right? Does one kiss both cheeks, or even kiss three times (very popular among Europeans today)? Or do you kiss the air? Are the rules different for men and women?

Some cultures do not use the kiss as a greeting. Asian cultures typically avoid bodily contact. Eskimos rub noses instead, and Maoris press their noses together.

Even hugs have variations. American men (and many women) seem to have a bit of a problem with hugs: Instead of "just hugging" they pat each others' backs repeatedly.


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There are many different ways to greet each other. In many regions, a raised hand is common. This may come from the desire, way back, to show that one has no weapons. European cultures take it one step further and clasp hands. It's as if two warriors want to show trust, but can't quite, and so need to hold on to each other's weapon-hands. The Chinese, on the other hand, "shake" their own hands, and Indians typically raise their hands in a prayer-like gesture.

A note: We shake right hands, not left. In fact, the left hand has been considered dirty by both European and Moslem cultures. It is the bathroom hand – the one you used to wipe yourself in the age of leaves, stones, or sand. It is still taboo in many countries to eat with your left hand.

Another greeting is the bow. It is a symbol of submission, which might be why it has never been as popular in the west as in the east. In Japan, the depth of the bow indicates relative status. If you are uncertain, repeated bows may be necessary until the correct relationship is established. Prostration is the extreme form.

The bow is to be contrasted with dominance gestures, any movement that raises one higher than others, such as being on a platform or tilting one's head back and looking down one's nose at someone. Being more comfortable than others is another way of indicating dominance – you shouldn't sit in the presence of royalty, for example.

Curiously, the yes nod and the no shake are nearly universal gestures. Erwin Straus' theory is that the yes nod is an abbreviated version of the bow of submission, i.e. "you are correct and I bow to your will." The no shake, on the other hand, involves no lowering of the body or the head. You remain erect, as if standing your ground, and only turn your head sideways, like a baby rejecting food.

His theory gains support when we look at the exceptions: In southern Italy and Greece, many people will toss their head backwards to say no. It looks a little like yes, but in fact only serves to exaggerate the erect "no" posture. On the other hand, in some parts of India, people say yes by pivoting their heads around an imaginary axis running from the nose to the back of the head. Again, at first glance, it looks more like no. But actually, it takes you out of the erect posture sideways, like a fancy bow. This curious yes gesture has evolved into an almost constant body movement among some Indians.

## Body language

Which brings us to body language. Body language is less conscious, less linguistic, than gestures. And we use and read body language a good deal more than we think we do.

For example, a tight body posture (arms tight against sides, perhaps folded; legs together and, if seated folded; muscles tensed) indicates stress, and most of us read it that way. A loose body posture, of course, suggests relaxation. Notice that we can fake either one and thereby hide our true emotional state.

While the communication of stress is clearly based in our biology, much of body language is cultural, although usually much less conscious than the gestures we spoke of before. In fact, here is an interesting place to note cultural variation, for example while looking at conversational movement. Some cultures are noted expressionists, making much use of the arms in particular. The Italians tend to use broad arm movements; Hasidic Jews use their arms a great deal as well, but keep their arms closer to their bodies, so that the movement is more up and down; The French have a tendency to reach forward with their gestures.

Other cultures are less exuberant. In the Far East, we see a great deal of restraint in regards to arm and hand movements; Russians tend to speak from a rather direct, face-to-face, flat-footed, arms hanging at their sides posture; Americans have a tendency to face slightly away and to rock sideways, moving from one foot to the other as if restless, and if hands and arms are used at all, it will be at the level of the waist.

One more aspect of body language involves body orientation: It is a sign of interest when we face someone. When we turn away a little, it begins to indicate disinterest. When we turn around and rapidly walk away.... Notice also that disinterest, and its body language, is a big part of being "cool," that is, of showing relative power. This is, partially, why teenagers often act so bored.


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## Eye contact

Generally, eye contact shows interest in much the same way, but things can be quite different in different cultures. The most common variation involves the lowering of the eyes by people of lower status, especially women. In many cultures, including to some extent our own, lowering the eyes is a sign of femininity! This is, of course, learned; and some people need to unlearn it in order to achieve a degree of "assertiveness."

Staring, on the other hand, is too much of a good thing in many countries. You can practically feel the weight of the stare. In some cultures, though, staring is polite when someone is talking to you, to show you are taking it all in. In others, like in Turkey, men commonly stare at women, a way of showing their sexual interest. Often, staring between men is a sign of aggressive intentions, a challenge to power.

A more biological aspect of eye contact involves the dilating of the pupils when we find something of interest. They dilate when we are aroused! So it used to be common to put eye drops in models eyes to dilate them before taking advertising photo's. But note that we also get aroused when angry, so do not assume a person is sexually interested in you on the basis of pupils alone.

## Time and Space

### Personal space

There are certain culturally specified distances for various interactions–usually one for public address, one for ordinary conversation, and one for intimate conversation. In our culture, public distance begins at about ten feet–which is part of the reason people tend not to sit in the front row of a classroom. The conversational distance is about 2 and a half feet, and the intimate distance is a few inches.

There is a little illustration of this called the parking lot waltz. If I take you into an open space, such as a parking lot, engage you in some conversation, and stand too close to you, you will feel uncomfortable and begin to back away. If I step closer, you will back off again. By changing angles, I can waltz you around the parking lot. Try it, it works. You will know that you are too close because you will feel uncomfortable, too. Things can go wrong, however, if you read my closeness as an attempt to get intimate and you either run away or beat me up.

The same works in reverse–but not as well. As you recall, moving away is read as a loss of interest, breaking off a conversation, so the other person is likely to say goodbye and leave. There are, of course, some people who don't read signs very well and will continue to talk to you even as you walk briskly away!

As I said, different cultures have different distances. Germans, for example, have longer conversational distances, three or three and a half feet. Arabs, on the other hand, have very short distances, one and a half and even one foot. It is considered a social pleasure to feel the other's warm, moist breath and smell their smells. Americans often feel uncomfortable when talking with Arabs and back away, which the Arab sees as being cold and impolite. Many international business deals must fall through because of personal distance!

Of course, we also have personal distances behind us and to the sides. We have, in fact, a personal envelope. At a relatively uncrowded bus stop, for example, people will spread themselves out to a comfortable degree.

Again, different cultures have different envelopes, and men and women differ as well. But notice the effect of context: Watch the different distributions of people at a party. Notice the differences between all male group, all female groups, and mixed groups. Or look at the way people squeeze through a crowd: Do they face the person they are brushing past, or turn their backs to them? It is interesting.

Situations change our personal envelopes. In New York City at three in the morning, a person walking behind us makes us nervous – even if they are a block away. But in a rush hour subway, we can be squeezed together like sardines, and we ignore the sexual or aggressive messages of violated intimate space, though we seldom feel comfortable!


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Two examples of the interaction of situations and envelops you might want to observe for yourself are the direction one faces in elevators and the effects of neighborliness at urinals.

The envelope can also vary because of personal experiences. A Vietnam veteran friend of mine would take off your head if you came up behind him too quickly. And some researchers have found that criminals tend to have rather large envelopes. The question remains: Did they get into crime because their huge envelopes were constantly getting stepped on, or did they develop huge envelopes in response to the dangerous games they play?

## Time

The anthropologist E. T. Hall distinguishes two broad conceptions of time: monochronic and polychronic. "M-time" is typical of modern, industrialized, western cultures – such as our own. "P-time" is typical of more traditional ones – such as we find in Latin America and the Middle East.

M-time involves schedules: Time is thought of as a ribbon or a road, and it is chopped up, with each piece assigned a certain purpose. Each piece has a clearly defined beginning and end: promptness counts; tardiness is a character flaw, if not a sin. Time is concrete: It can be saved or spent, lost or made up... and eventually you run out. We have clocks and calendars and use them – or rather they use us.

M-time is really rather arbitrary (why 50 minute classes? 40 hour work weeks? 15 week semesters?). You have to learn to follow all these schedules: except for the day, the year, and the seasons, they do not come naturally. Also, you deal with people in a way that is molded by m-time: one person (or a few) at a time, orderly, separately... Life is segmented; social life is segmented.

P-time, on the other hand, makes Americans crazy: The first thing likely to hit you is the lack of concern about appointments. An hour wait is not at all bad – if you complain, they point out that they were speaking with someone important – and you wouldn't want them to rush someone important! A government office may have a courtyard where dozens of appointments sit or walk about, and several officials "mingle" with them, rather than everyone lining up for their 15 minutes. If you get ignored – well, perhaps you're problem wasn't sufficiently significant to cause you to step up and interrupt!

P-time is people-oriented, task-oriented, and very much tradition-oriented: Like the priest who can’t see you now because someone needs him or an artist who'll get to you when the inspiration has worn off a bit, the present moment is rather sacrosanct. "3:15 on October 28th," on the other hand, is an abstraction that means nothing in P-time.

This, of course, is terribly inefficient!

In contrast, we M-timers schedule not only our work but our fun as well: dinner at 8:00, a weekend in N.Y., two weeks vacation, Roseanne at 9:00 (for precisely one half hour), John has the kids on Saturdays, spends a little "quality time" with them, sex on Friday at 10:00....

M-time is efficient, and it's likely that we would never have developed our high-tech society without it. But it is also alienating. It turns us into something akin to the very machines we work with: wristwatches, punchclocks, factory whistles, assembly lines, computers.


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## Inference of Responsibility

Imagine you are walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City when a kid jumps out of an alley, pushes you to the ground, and steals your wallet or purse – in which you have all your vacation money. You report the robbery to the police and – a miracle! – they actually catch the kid. You are ready to string the little S.O.B. up, right?

Attribution theory, which deals with inferences of responsibility, would call your present attitude an internal attribution of causality, meaning that you assign the responsibility for what happened to the kid. The cause is inside him somehow: He's rotten.

Let's say they actually catch the little son-of-a-gun. But you find out from the police that this robbery is a part of a local gang's initiation rites, and that if a neighborhood kid doesn't participate, he and his family can expect severe abuse from the gang. And the kid's only twelve years old!

Attribution theory would now suggest that you will now make an external attribution of causality. You're still mad as hell, but it's not so much the kid anymore. Now it's that rotten New York City environment, the state of the world, or whatever. The kid is still the focus, but the causes of his behavior are seen as external to him.

The founder of attribution theory, Harold Kelley, suggested that we make our attributions the same way a scientist (or a detective) does: by asking questions.

### Attribution rules

Let's look at a question of responsibility: "Why did George's quiche turn out runny?" In attribution theory terms, George is the person; the quiche is the entity; the relation between them is "making it turn out runny." We answer the question of responsibility by asking a few more questions:

1. Distinctiveness: Does George make other entities (eggs, souffle's, apple pies, meat loafs,...) runny or otherwise hard to get in your mouth? If no, the particular event is highly distinct – rare for George. If yes, the event has low distinctiveness – this is common for George.

2. Consensus: Do other people tend to make quiche runny, or otherwise mess it up? Is there a "consensus" on this problem? If no, the event has low consensus – few people have George's problem with quiche. If yes, it has high consensus – everybody messes up their quiche.

3. Consistency: Does George's quiche always turn out runny? If no, the relationship has a low consistency – George's quiche is usually top-notch. If yes, there is a high consistency – George has trouble with quiche.

| **Quiche** (entity) | **George** (person) | **Destroys** (relation) |
|---|---|---|
| is this entity distinctive? | is there a consensus? | is this pattern consistent? |
| (does it happen to other entities?) | (does it happen to other people?) | (does it happen on other occasions?) |

By answering these questions we can make attributions beyond simple internal or external:

1. If we answer that George makes everything runny, but most people have no problem with quiche, and


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furthermore George's quiche always comes out runny, we can make a person attribution: George can't cook. This is the same as the internal attribution.

2. If we answer that George doesn't have this problem with other foods, but other people mess up their quiche, and on top of it all George often has a problem with quiche, then we make a kind of external attribution called the entity attribution: Quiche is a pain.

3. If we answer that George messes up everything and everybody has trouble with quiche, and certainly George has had this problem before, we can make a person-entity attribution (either sufficient): George can't cook and quiche is a pain.

4. If we answer than George doesn't make everything runny, and that most people don't have a problem with quiche, but it is indeed true that George is always having this problem with quiche, we make another version of the person-entity attribution where both are necessary what I prefer to call a relation attribution: George and quiche just don't get along.

5. But if the answers are that George never has a problem with making things runny, and that other people don't have that problem with quiche, and George doesn't always have this problem with quiche, we make a circumstance attribution: It was a coincidence, an accident, a bad day.

All this requires quite a bit of information – what X does in other situations, what others do, past experiences X has had with the situation, and so on. Often we must deal with one-time events. In these circumstances all we can do is take a look around and try to make sense of things with what we have at hand:

**1. The discounting principle:** The more things you see making something inevitable, the less important any one thing seems – including the person you are looking at. An external attribution is more likely. Joe has a fender-bender? He's a jerk. At two in the morning? He was sleepy. In the rain? It was slippery. With a cut brake line? Joe sounds less and less like a jerk and more and more like the victim of circumstances. The more reasons for it happening, the less blame you lay on him.

Discounting can also diminish the credit you give someone: John won the faculty car race! Wow! He drives a Ferrari. Oh.

**2. The augmenting principle:** The more things you see making a something unlikely, the more important a reason for it happening seems – especially the person. An internal attribution becomes likely. He won the triathalon? Good. He is handicapped? Great! He is 70 years old? Incredible! He's been dead for a week? What a man! The more reasons for failure, the more credit you give him.

Augmenting can also increase the blame you give someone: John ran out of gas. Too bad. I warned him he was low. Quite the sieve-brain, that John.

## Biases

So far, we are entertaining a rather rational view of ourselves. In truth, we are a bit less than rational–we have our biases.

1. The fundamental attribution error. We tend to see others as internally motivated and responsible for their behavior. This could be because of perceptual salience, that is, the other person is what we see most of when we look at them; or it could be that we lack more detailed information about what causes their behavior. But some social psychologists suggest that people are more often the causes of their behavior than the researchers who came up with the fundamental attribution error believe. In other words, it may be those researchers who have the bias!

Perhaps the saddest example of the tendency to make internal attributions whether they are warranted or not is blaming the victim. If giving someone our sympathy or blaming the true culprit somehow causes us dissonance, we may hold the victim responsible for his or her own pain and suffering. "He had it coming" and "she was asking for it" are all-too-common phrases!


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2. The actor-observer effect. On the other hand, we tend to see ourselves, as more externally motivated. As kids say, he did it on purpose but I couldn't help it. This could be perceptual salience as well – when I look at my behavior, all I see is its environmental causes; it could be that we simply have more information about our own motivations.

We can play with the salience idea: For example, if we are sitting next to someone in a debate, we tend to "see things from his point of view," including seeing the person across from both of you as more in control and more aggressive – i.e. more "internal". If you sympathize with someone, on the other hand, you tend to attribute external causes for his or her behavior – "My brother couldn't help it, your honor!" And some therapists use videotapes of their clients in order to encourage the taking of responsibility. For example, drunks rarely have a realistic view of their own behavior and tend to believe they are in control; a tape of themselves staggering about and being obnoxious might help.

**3. The self-serving bias.** But, adding to the confusion, we tend to see ourselves as the causes of our successes, but external events as the causes of our failures. If it works, I did it; if it doesn't, it was God's will. We may have more information about our motivations; but we may not want to acknowledge it.

An exception to the self-serving bias can be found in people's attitudes towards complicated machinery, such as computers. When things go wrong, we tend to blame ourselves – "I must have done something wrong!" In fact, the problem is more often one of bad engineering and poor software design!

**4. The just-world hypothesis.** This is the idea that everything works for the best: If you're good, good things will happen to you; if you're bad, bad things will happen to you. Now this really isn't terribly realistic, but we get even worse: we reverse the logic, and believe that, if good things happen to you, you must've deserved them, and if bad things happen to you you, you must've deserved them, too!

This makes for all sorts of weird things, like people feeling guilty when bad things happen that they had no control over, or assuming that the victims of natural disasters or criminal acts are not as worthy as others and may even have had it coming to them! And we tend to like lucky people and feel like we deserve riches we get by inheritance, and so on.

As we will see in more detail later, we never seem to think quite so logically when we are personally involved. There are, in fact, even more biases of attribution, involving the severity of consequences, how those consequences impact on us, and whether we detect signs of intention. We will likely discover more as time goes by.


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# Self-Defense

Balance Theory, Dissonance Theory, and Transactional Analysis


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## Balance

If you recall, distress can be based on several possibilities:

1. Incorrect anticipation, as when, for example, you reach out to shake someone's hand – and yours passes right through his!
2. Uncertain anticipation, as with roaches and mice and the like.
3. Conflicting anticipations, where you expect two or more things at once.

The first two are based on problems in the relations between "mind and world," that is, between your understanding of reality and your perceptions of it. But the last one involves relations within your mind and can occur even without active involvement with the world. When you have conflicting anticipations, it almost doesn't matter what the world has to say, and distress, therefore, can be something very internal, very personal.

Although we tend to assume that adaptation will involve learning new ways to deal with difficult reality, or at least learning to accept reality as it is, it is also quite conceivable, regardless of the source of our distress, that adaptation will involve a denial or distortion of reality and actions that keep the problem at a distance instead of solving it. In other words, adaptation can also serve to separate us from reality.

I call this psychological self-defense. It involves lying to oneself, but, like physical self-defense, it is not necessarily something that must be avoided at all cost: We often, in this difficult life, need to defend ourselves from inevitable confusion. Keep this in mind.

### Balance theory

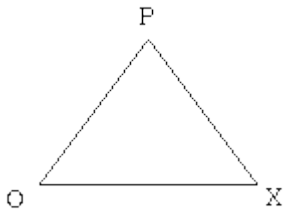
Fritz Heider, a social psychologist with a Gestalt background, developed a theory about these things called balance theory or "P-O-X" theory.

Let's say you are the parent of a small child. Your baby comes home from kindergarten one afternoon bearing a gift. You tear into the crude wrapping and find –surprise! – a clay ashtray. It is easily the ugliest entity in the universe, and you don't smoke. But your little artist stands there before you with a smile as broad as all outdoors and eyes sparkling with unbounded pride.

You say to your child "oh thank you so much; it's so very beautiful; you sure are good at art; I love it; we'll put it right here in the display case with the antique crystal collection!" What folks who haven't gone through this don't understand is that you meant every word.

Fritz Heider looks at it like this: You are the person (P); your child is the other (O); the clay ashtray is the third element in the triangle (X). And there are several relations among them:

There are two kinds of relations operating within the triangle:




1. Unit relations: Things and people that "belong together," that in some fashion make a good Gestalt. Perhaps you remember from introductory psychology some ideas about perception – that we tend to "group" things because of similarity, proximity, common fate, and so on: So, two collie dogs walking together side-by-side, in the same direction form more of a unit (gestalt) than a duck and a cow, 100 feet apart, moving in different directions.

In reference to people, we can think of them as belonging together if they share nationality, religion, social status, family membership, etc. – that is, if they can be subsumed by some social construct. We see things as belonging to people if they are possessions or property or actions and the like.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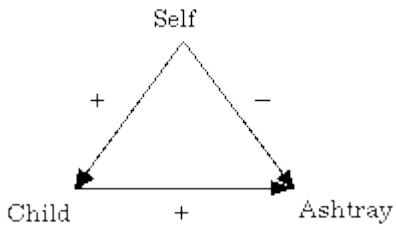
2. Sentiment relations: Our evaluations of things and people; loving, hating, accepting, rejecting, worshiping, condemning, etc. Heider simplifies matters for our purposes by limiting sentiment to liking and disliking.

In our example, we have a positive sentiment relation towards our child, and our child has a positive unit relation with the clay ashtray. The last side of the triangle to be filled-in is our sentiment relation to the ashtray. It is at his point that Heider makes his prediction: It will be positive.

Heider says that our minds tend to seek out a balanced state when dealing with such situations, wherein the relations among person, other, and thing are "harmonious." Three positive relations are harmonious. So are two negative relations with one positive relation:




"I don't like John.

John has a dog.

I don't like the dog either."

These latter triangles are less happy, but no less balanced.

On the other hand, we tend to avoid unbalanced states. Two positive relations with one negative one is unbalanced:

"I love my child.
She made this ashtray.
I hate the ashtray."

In these triangles, the relations are stressed to change. We will tend to adapt by convincing ourselves that one of the relations is other than it is. You might convince yourself that your child didn't really make the ashtray; you might decide you don't really like your child as much as you thought; or you might decide you like the ashtray. In the broader picture, we do see parents balancing the triangle by "losing" the ashtray or, more sinister, communicating their disappointment, using threats or guilt, and otherwise pushing the child to be the child they would have liked to have had.

There is also the unbalanced triangle with three negatives:

I don't like John;

I don't like dogs;

John doesn't like dogs.

Sometimes we do feel that we should not share even negative feelings with someone we dislike, but it is understood that this is a weaker form than the preceding one. Heider felt that negatives are less powerful than positives in the formula generally.

Heider didn't restrict his balance theory to triangles. If, for example, we have a person and a thing and we look at the unit and sentiment relations between them, we can also see harmony or the stress toward change. "This is my book and I like it" is balanced, as is, in a less powerful way, "this is not my book and I don't like it". On the other hand, "this is not my book and I like it" is unbalanced, and we might tend to buy, borrow, or steal it. "This is my book and I hate it" is also unbalanced, and we might tend to sell it, give it away, or burn it.

Going back to the p-o-x triangle, imagine this unbalanced situation: John likes a painting by a woman he hates. He might decide that he didn't like the painting as much as he thought. He might decide that he didn't hate the women as much as he thought. He might even figure that she didn't really paint the picture. All of these options, you can see, are distortions or denials of reality.

There is another option: He may attempt to repair the imbalance by differentiation, developing a new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contrast! That is, he may come to the conclusion that the woman is a good painter but has a horrid personality. Before, John really has only one contrast here: good versus bad, applicable to painting, personality, and whatever else. Now he has two contrasts: good versus bad painting and good versus bad personality, so good people can lack talent and nasty people can have it. By doing this, he is expanding his construct system, loosening up his stereotypical way of thinking. Heider says this is probably not used as much as defensive techniques!

## Dissonance Theory

A theory that is similar to Heider's but focuses on somewhat different concerns is Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. It has a very simple central principle: "An individual strives to produce consonance and to avoid dissonance." We experience dissonance when we become aware that our actions contradict certain beliefs about ourselves. Consonance, as you might imagine, is the peaceful absence of dissonance, synonymous with Heider's "harmony."

If I consider myself an honest person, that belief implies that I don't lie. Yet I catch myself in the middle of a lie. This is dissonant. Or I know that I love my parents. This implies that I write them more than once per year. Yet once a year is exactly how often I write. This, too, is dissonant. Or I don't do things to harm myself. Cigarettes are bad for me. And I am at this moment dragging on a cigarette.

Dissonance, like imbalance, is "stressed to change." I might change my behavior, quit smoking, for example. I might change my belief that I don't do things to harm myself, which is at least honest. But the weakest link in this example is the connection between the two: the idea that cigarettes are bad for me. I have personally told myself such things as "it keeps the weight off," "the anxiety would kill me sooner," "the research had flaws," "cigarettes are just a scapegoat for industrial pollution," "they'll discover a cure soon," "I only smoke a few packs a day," and "it won't happen to me." One way or another, we tend to change our beliefs – "fix" them – in an effort to reduce the dissonance: We lie to ourselves.

Most of the research done on dissonance involves a matter of inadequate justification, that is, the reasons for doing something just weren't good enough: I lied to my friend. This is normally dissonant with my belief that I, as a good friend, do not lie – unless I have "a real good reason" (i.e. an adequate justification), like saving his life, or maybe saving his feelings. Without such a "real good reason," there is inadequate justification.

### Insufficient rewards

The most obvious example of inadequate justification is insufficient rewards – the subject of the most famous cognitive dissonance experiment:

Festinger and Carlsmith had volunteers do a dull, miserable task (such as adding up columns of numbers or stacking spools) for hours at a time. As they were about to leave, the volunteers were asked to tell the next volunteer that the task was actually fun, and were offered money to do this. Some were offered, say, a dollar. Others were offered a twenty. After they did their dirty deed, the experimenter came running after them, saying that he forgot to have them fill out a form. Embedded in the form were questions concerning how much they enjoyed the task. If they had lied to their fellow volunteer for a twenty, they said that the task was boring as hell. If they had done it for a buck, they actually said that the task wasn't so bad! In other words, there was insufficient reward to justify the lie. So they fixed the dissonance by lying to themselves about the task!

One moral to the story is that, if you want to change a person's beliefs, use as little reward as you can get away with. If you give them too much, they will know why they did it: for the reward. If you give them just barely enough to get them to do it, they will need to convince themselves that they did it for other reasons, such as they really wanted to. People are strange.


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Why not go all the way, then: If you can get someone to do something dissonant for nothing, they should really go out of their way to convince themselves things aren't dissonant at all.

Deci had subjects working on jigsaw puzzles for hours late at night. Some had been told they would be paid; others thought they were volunteering. He gave them breaks during which they could loaf or continue puzzling. The salaried subjects tended to loaf; the unsalaried subjects tended to continue with their puzzles. They had convinced themselves that they were enjoying themselves.

But notice that there is an alternative interpretation: Puzzles are enjoyable, at least modestly so. Could it be that it was the salaried subjects that had done the dissonance-fixing? Could they have convinced themselves that, since they were being paid to do this, this is work and they could not possibly be enjoying themselves, and so would need to loaf at the first opportunity?

This second interpretation has sinister implications. Think about how we encourage children to study for gold stars, smiley face stamps, and grades. Think about how we make a job worthwhile by paying higher salaries. It is possible that the more external rewards we provide for something, the weaker become the natural internal rewards. Notice the difference between your enjoyment of a book you chose to read and one assigned to read! We will see this idea again.

## Insufficient threat

Another version of inadequate justification is insufficient threat – if you do not do something you would like to do, even though the threat was weak, you will tend to believe that you didn't really want to do it in the first place – the "sour grapes" syndrome.

If you are not doing something you would like to do because you have been threatened, you will experience some dissonance, naturally. But the stronger the threat, the weaker the dissonance; the weaker the threat, the stronger the dissonance. Doing something improper for a hundred dollars makes sense; so does going against your desires when threatened with disembowelment. Here's an experiment:

Freedman left a fancy, shiny, absolutely irresistible toy robot with a bunch of young children. Some were given a gentle warning not to touch. Others were given stern warnings. Later, another adult gave the children permission to touch the robot. The kids who received the mild warning left it alone; the ones who were threatened went right to it. Other experiments show that the children who were given the mild warning actually change their evaluation of the robot downward.

Again, there is an alternative view, still in keeping with cognitive dissonance, that suggests that the threat raises the evaluation of the robot: the "forbidden fruit" syndrome.

## Guilt

Dissonance helps us to understand the distortions we engage in when we feel guilty: (1) I am nice; (2) I do x; (3) x is not nice. Am I therefore not nice after all? Or did I not actually do x? No: x is not so bad, i.e. we rationalize.

Davis and Jones had people individually watch a live interview, then asked some to tell the interviewee that he looked stupid. The experimenters found that those people rated their victim as generally less attractive.

Soldiers have, of course, been taught for millennia to denigrate their enemies – see them as sub-human trash that one can "waste" with impunity. It is simply too painful for most people to think of themelves as killing nice people!

Glass asked subjects to shock other subjects (for the usual, made-up, "good reasons") and found that people who thought of themselves as good were even more likely to "put-down" their victims. Beware the self-righteous!

Bersheid, using the same basic situation, told some of her subjects that they would be trading places with the


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person they were shocking. This is presumably a less dissonant dilemma, so less to fix, so less derogation of their "partner." Soldiers also often learn to respect their enemy.

The 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said "my memory says that I did it, my pride says that I could not have done it, and in the end, my memory yields."

## Temptation

The flip-side of guilt is temptation: Not doing something despite the possibility of a decent reward. As we said, if someone tempts you to do something dissonant – e.g. immoral – and you accept, the larger the reward, the weaker the dissonance, and vice versa. What happens if you decline the reward, if you resist temptation? Now we would expect that the larger the reward, the larger the dissonance.

Judson Mills did the definitive experiment in temptation. He set up a game for children which was easy – and most useful – to cheat at. Some of the kids were offered big prizes; some were only offered little ones. Of course, some of the kids in each group cheated, and some did not.

Prior to the game, Mills had asked the kids individually for their attitudes towards various things – including cheating. As you might expect, most kids had negative attitudes toward cheating, but mildly negative. After the game, he asked for their attitudes again. Those who had cheated for the big prize didn't change their attitudes toward cheating. Those who didn't cheat for the little prize didn't change their attitudes either. Those who did cheat for the little prize showed more lenient attitudes than before. And those who didn't cheat for the big prize became more severe.

Cheat – big prize – no change in attitudes
Didn't cheat – little prize – no change in attitudes
Cheat – little prize – more lenient attitude (guilt!)
Didn't cheat – big prize – more severe attitude (temptation!)

The moral of the story is that those who have been sorely tempted are the most likely to"crack down" on the very thing they had been so sorely tempted by! This leads to interesting hypotheses about blue-nose prudes, law-and-order extremists, and homosexual-haters.

## Excessive effort

One more way we get "inadequate justification" is through excessive effort: The harder you've worked at something you discover to be dissonant, the more dissonance you will feel, and therefore the more you will try to "fix" it. "I worked hard for X; X is worthless; I don't do worthless things; therefore X couldn't be worthless.

An experiment by Yaryan and Festinger went something like this: Subjects volunteered for a "techniques of studying" experiment. They were asked to study a list of word definitions in preparation for an I.Q. test, but were told that only half of them would actually take the test. One group of these students were told to glance over the list and that it would be available to them during the test; the other group was told to memorize the list because they would not be permitted to take it with them. After they glanced at or memorized the list, they were asked to estimate the odds that they would be one of the people chosen to actually take the test. The glancers estimated–as they had been told–50 %. The memorizers–facing the prospect of having done all this work for nothing–exaggerated their odds, despite the fact that they had been told the odds in advance!

In the ordinary world, we see this idea being used to increase loyalty: Fraternities, military organizations, and primitive tribes put pledges, plebes, and pubescent boys through hell. Afterwards, who would say to themselves "I went through hell and it sure wasn't worth it?"

One curious example familiar to students: We sometimes remember our toughest teachers in a very positive light – whether their toughness actually contributed to our learning or not!


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This can work in reverse as well: If something is too easy, we may devalue the goal. For example, we may take a course in which it is easy to get an A, and then claim that the course was worthless – which may not be true at all!

## Intensifying dissonance

One thing that can intensify dissonance is irrevocability. Once something is done, and you can't "take it back," you had better be happy with it, even if you have to distort reality to do it. Even negative thoughts will feel uncomfortable.

Knox and Inkster asked people at a race track to estimate their favorite horse's odds. Some of these people were waiting to place their bets; others had just placed them. Before betting, people gave odds similar to those in the forms; after betting, they were considerably more confident.

Now, I must add a caveat here: I suspect that there are quite a few people who, like me, know they did the wrong thing after ever decision they make, people who seem to have trouble fixing dissonance or even find themselves drawn to increased uncertainty. I, for example, always know I bought the wrong pair of shoes soon after I've put the first scuff marks on the soles! We'll come back to these folks later.

Another thing that intensifies dissonance is choice: Choosing from a large number of alternatives seems to require that we be happier with our choice than choosing from a limited number. If I have few alternatives, I am not so free to vary; I can understand less than total satisfaction because I literally didn't have the choice. If I have many alternatives, I could have made a better choice. A car bought from a large lot will be defended by its new owner with more vigor than one bought from a small lot. A "successful" bachelor will be more likely to see his bride as the epitome of womanhood than one with a more modest past.

There are two little techniques for keeping dissonance to a minimum that show up neatly here: selective attention and selective memory. We will pay attention more to information that supports our choice, or remember such information more clearly. This is a useful skill, to say the least.

One experiment looked at people who had just decided to buy a particular car. They were told that they would have to wait a few minutes for certain paperwork to be done, and that they could look through a catalog of car ads while they waited. What they weren't told is that they'd be videotaped, and someone would later time how long they looked at what ads. What the researchers found was that people would look longest at the ads for the car they had decided on, and least at ads for similar cars. In other words, they really wanted to confirm their choice, and ignore the close possibilities.

## The exceptions

I mentioned that some people not only cannot seem to fix dissonance, but actually seem to make things worse for themselves. In Hans Eysenck's theory, he suggests that introverts are what they are because they can't seem to deny or otherwise ignore traumatic events–they don't have the nice protective devices that the extravert has. If an extravert drops his pants at a party, the next day, when you bring it up, he might say "Yeah? No kidding?" If the same thing happened to an introvert, he would remember it, relive it, for decades afterward. So I would suggest that introverts are the exception to dissonance-fixing phenomena, though not to dissonance itself.

Eysenck also has a second dimension of temperament called neuroticism. He sees this as a matter of "sympathetic hyperactivity," that is, emotional over-response. It is, in fact, the traditional understanding of neurosis that it involves great anxiety. Anxiety, the distressful anticipation of distress, is quite similar to dissonance. So I would suggest that high neuroticism would exaggerate the introvert (as well as extravert) pattern in regard to dissonance and dissonance-fixing. Oddly, this fits well with certain psychopathologies and with certain Freudian interpretations of those psychopathologies. Perhaps one of you will do a dissertation on this!


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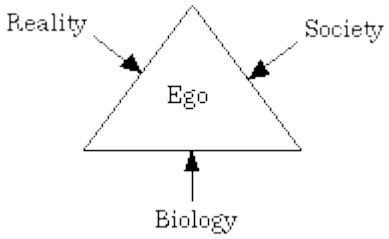
## Defenses

As cognitive dissonance researchers themselves have pointed out, the most significant dissonance occurs when we have incongruency between our self-concept (or self-image) and our actual behaviors. This is abundantly confirmed by therapist-theoreticians such as Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, George Kelly, Albert Bandura, Viktor Raimy, and many others.

An occasional lie to support our egos might not be so bad. But lies breed lies: "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!" And before you know it, your self-concept and your actual behavior are so far apart that you are faced with nothing but problems.

As Carl Rogers would put it, the more the incongruency between what you believe yourself to be and what you really are, the more you find yourself faced with threatening situations, which in turn encourage you to distort things some more....




Freud talked about this at great length: The poor ego ("I") is surrounded by the often-conflicting demands of three powerful entities: reality, the id (representing our biological drives), and the superego (representing parental – i.e. society's – demands). For example, a man might be so angry that he would like to beat his kids. But that's not right, he's not that kind of father, and besides, his wife would take the kids and leave him....

When all those pressures get to be too much, the ego feels overwhelmed, like it's about to be washed away. We all too often feel like we're about to lose control, go out of our minds, go crazy, die....

This is anxiety, and not too different from strong dissonance. To deal with it, the ego sets up barriers against reality, the id, and the superego, which are called the ego defense mechanisms, or defenses, for short.

Freud, his daughter Anna Freud, and later Freudians, elaborated on some two dozen defenses. But we'll leave those to courses on personality theories, and focus instead on the two defenses that Carl Rogers focused on:

Denial – a term also used by the Freudians – is to refuse to attend to certain phenomena, to push them into the background and avoid making them "figures." Some students never pick up their tests, for example. Or a widow sets a place at her table for her late husband and has conversations with him.

Rogers includes in denial what the Freudians call repression – the "denial" of memories. You almost drowned as a child, but now you can't seem to remember it – or, in fact, the whole weekend. (But you do have a fear of open water – i.e. you can never completely deny reality!)

Notice that we are talking about selective attention and selective memory again!

We can symbolize denial (and repression) so:

It is primitive, difficult, yet still close to the "surface" of awareness.

Distortion is a bit more sophisticated, more automatic, and harder to spot. It could be symbolized so:

We "sneak around" the threatening phenomena – perceptions or memories – with little lies, misperceptions, misconceptions, ....

This is also known as rationalization. When students fail a test, they occasionally go to great lengths to explain their failure: Bad prof, misleading questions, weird book, the party last night – anything other than reasons which threaten their self-esteem (stupidity, laziness, alcoholism...). Mind you, sometimes the excuses are the reasons – sometimes it is the professor! Which makes distortion easier to engage in and much more dangerous in the long run!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Note that sometimes we create the reason, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, a student may get drunk the night before the exam. When he fails, he can say to himself that it was the hangover, not his stupidity.

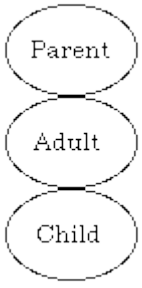
Therapists have a hard time with people who distort heavily, such as paranoids and histrionic personalities. Sometimes, the web of lies becomes so complex that it can easily include the therapist!

Taken to the extreme, distortion becomes what the existentialists call conventionality or "busy-ness." We don't notice problems because we are so caught up in our own conventional little lives. War? Starvation? Pollution? Injustice? Inhumanity? In a minute... right now, it's time for Wheel of Fortune! Conventionality can be drawn so:

With conventionality, no-one has to anxiously block experiences or invent rationalizations. The problems remain unconscious (ignored) because they have become a part of the social background. Whenever we feel that something must be the way it is, or that it is only natural or rational, when we say that of course we must have war, or of course there have to be rich and poor, or of course this must be forbidden and that absolutely required, we may be facing a society-wide defense!

## Social Dissonance and Dissonance Fixing

We've been talking about dissonance-fixing as mostly a matter of subtly or massively altering your self – your beliefs, attitudes, feelings, whatever. You can also reduce dissonance by changing things "out there." For example, "I'm a clean person; a clean person keeps a clean house; my house is a pig sty." The dissonance can be fixed by cleaning the house.




But how about this: "I deserve slavish attention from my spouse; my spouse won't give it to me." Presuming your attitudes don't change, it may be necessary to change your spouse! We can get rid of that spouse and try another (and another, and another...). Or we can manipulate the present spouse, make them feel guilty, badger them, beat them, whatever it takes. I call this social dissonance and social dissonance-fixing.

Someone who has made a detailed study of this is the social psychiatrist Eric Berne, the inventor of Transactional Analysis and the author of Games People Play, among other books. Berne has a Freudian background and so uses Freudian terminology. He elaborates the ego by seeing it as having three "ego-states" which correspond to those three forces it must deal with: The aspect of the ego that is most intimate with reality is the adult; the aspect most intimate with the id is the child; and the aspect most intimate with the superego is the parent. The adult's strength is reason; the child's is play, which may become hedonistic abandon; and the parent's strength is morality, which may become self-righteousness. He draws the ego like this:

If we put two egos next to each other, we have a diagrammatical representation of social interactions, which he calls transactions. There are complementary transactions, like these:

They might represent transactions like "Aren't kids awful?" "They certainly are!" (a), "Let's play!" "Oh goodie!" (b), and "George, straighten up!" "Yes my little passion flower!" (c). Sometimes we don't agree on what transaction we are performing, in which case we have a crossed transaction:

"Now Martha, let's take a look at our finances." "Snookums wanna cuddle?" (a), and "Now Martha, let's take a look at our finances." "Alright. Then you'll have to quit your stupid hobbies!" (b) are examples. These are certainly not happy transactions, and we often find them in troubled relationships. But there is one more: Under the cover of a regular complementary transaction, we may have a simultaneous ulterior transaction.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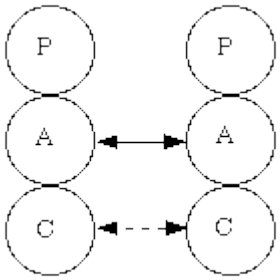


A cowboy on a dude ranch says to a female visitor "Come, let me show you the barn." To which she responds "Please do! I've always loved barns, since I was a little girl!" Although it is conceivable that they do share a bizarre fascination with barns, it is more likely that they are flirting like crazy. Under the cover of adult-adult, they are playing child-child. They are, in Berne's terms, playing a game.

Berne and his students have come up with hundreds of games. Just to give you a taste, here are a couple of scenarios involving the avoidance of responsibility, a very common theme for games:

## "See what you made me do"

Mr. and Mrs. White are engaged in a little foreplay. When things have warmed up a bit, Mrs. White suddenly says "I hope little Johnny's asleep." Mr. White loses his temper at this and shouts "Now you've done it! You've broken the mood! I might as well go to sleep!"

Actually, says Berne, this is a little game that Mr. and Mrs. White play on a regular basis. By going through this game, Mrs. White gets to avoid the sex she's never really felt comfortable with and Mr. White gets to avoid the humiliating failures he occasionally experiences, while neither has to admit their reservations!

Me, I'm always writing the great book, except that I never have quite enough time, and the constant interruptions.... It's wonderful when you don't trust your own abilities to be able to blame your lack of success on the intrusions of others!

## "If it weren't for you"

A woman complains about her unrewarding, self-sacrificing life as a housewife. "If it weren't for you" – she says to her traditional, authoritarian husband – "I could've gone to school and really made something out of myself!"

In reality, she went to a great deal of trouble to find this joker in order that she wouldn't have to face what she most feared: going to school and facing the world of business. He, of course, is playing his own little game: By playing the "bad guy," he gets what he wants as well. Games are usually little social contracts between the players. They have manipulated each other into maintaining the status quo while evading the dissonance (anxiety, guilt) involved in taking responsibility. It is easier to play roles than it is to face the challenges of life.

## More social dissonance and dissonance-fixing

The sociologist Erving Goffman places the whole of dissonance and dissonance-fixing outside the person and into the social interaction. He sees people as actors playing certain roles in a play. This metaphor is the basis of the dramaturgical approach to social psychology.


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For example, in a social get-together, no one should lose face. If John insults Mary, for example, the group will feel her loss of face as something akin to a dissonance. Mary or someone in the group will have to challenge John: "What did you say?" "You didn't mean that, did you?" "And what about your family?" etc. If John wants to remain in the group, he must make amends ("fix the dissonance"): "Just kidding, you know!" "Ah Mary, you're such a good sport!" "Jeez, what a jerk I am!" or just "I'm sorry!" Mary (hopefully) accepts his apologies and forgives him, John (hopefully) thanks her, and life goes on. This pattern – insult, challenge, amends, acceptance, thanks – is quite real: Try sometime not to play the game like this!

There are lots of variations, of course: The offender can "challenge" himself; amends may be repeated; someone else may make the amends, even the offendee; and so on. Insults can be ignored, winning lots of face points for the person secure enough to do this. But if there are no amends made, the group will either break up or expel (or even hurt) the offender.

The rules can, however, be manipulated. For example, it doesn't matter who does the insulting – it has to be fixed. So, you can insult yourself! A truly ugly person says "I'm so ugly!" and everyone is obliged to respond with "Nah!" "Beauty is in the eye of he beholder," and "You have a great personality!" Or a truly dumb person says "I'm so stupid" and everyone has to say "Nah!" "You're good with your hands," and "who needs an I.Q. anyway!" They must give this person face.

What is more threatening is aggressive face work such as snubs and digs: People with status often insult others with impunity – they can afford to. Academics do this all the time by trying to suggest that their tastes are impeccable with dialogs like "Did you watch the concert on PBS last night?" "No, I don't own a TV."

We can go one step further and combine the previous two techniques: An attractive, slender woman says to her chubbo friends "I'm getting so fat! I can barely fit into my size five anymore!" The smartest guy in the class says "Jeez, I only got a 95!" This is clever: They are insulting you by "insulting" themselves, so you can't touch them. Sounds a bit like a game, doesn't it?


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# Prejudice

From Stereotypes to Bigotry


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## Stereotypes

We have an often dramatic example of the use of contrasts in anticipation of people in our tendency to use stereotypes. A stereotype is a relatively simple and inflexible set of traits consistently applied to some category of people: Men are aggressive and oversexed; Women are weak and talkative; Fat people are jolly and lazy; The Dutch are very clean but real cheapskates.

Stereotyping is a normal part of our functioning – simplifying things a bit helps us to keep track of all the complexities of social life. It's okay as long as reality remains the ultimate arbiter of truth. But that is often not the case. Here are a few of the potential pitfalls:

**1. Sweeping generalization:** Taking the traits associated with a group and forcing them onto an individual who belongs to that group. An individual member of a group need not reflect the traits associated with the group, even if those traits are accurate. Norms need not be adhered to; averages are fictions. Your author is a chubby person, so allow me to use "fat people" as the example: We may have good reason to believe that fat people are slow. Yet I have met fat people who can trounce skinny ones on the tennis court! How would you like to be denied a job because your appearance suggests to the employer that you won't work efficiently?

**2. Hasty generalization:** Taking the traits of an individual and assuming they apply to all members of his or her group. We often build our stereotypes on the flimsiest of foundations, such as the following.

> **Second-hand information:** Many, if not most, stereotypes are based on what others tell us–our families, teachers, friends, media, etc.–who may, in fact, have heard it from someone else again. Where did you get that stereotype of Arabs, for example? Have you actually met an Arab? How well did you get to know them, if you did?
>
> **Out-dated information:** Even if the second-hand information contains some truth, it may well be based on experiences of long ago. Do Arabs still – or did they ever – live in tents? Or is this something you saw in old movies? Many stereotypes are rooted in the hatreds towards immigrant groups 100 or more years ago.
>
> **Limited samples:** Whether the stereotype is second-hand or is based on personal experience, it may well be based on limited experience with the group in question. If you have indeed met some Arabs, how many have you met, and are they a representative population?
>
> Or take Italian food: Most Americans think of Italian food as involving pasta, olive oil, and tomato sauce; in fact, much Italian food is a matter of bread, fish, butter, and white sauce. Most immigrants to the U.S. were from the southern regions of Italy, and that is the "sample" of cooking we are familiar with!
>
> **Vividness:** What is most noticeable about a group, what makes them more different from ourselves or others, is often falsely considered to be "normal." Arabs are oil-rich, the Dutch wear wooden shoes, American Indians wear feathers...all three of these are exceptional, yet, because they are distinctive, they stick in our minds.
>
> Polynesians are sensual, Japanese extremely polite... even when the characteristics contain a certain amount of truth, they often hide other, equally true, characteristics. The Polynesians, for example, have some pretty strict rules about modesty, and the Japanese can be very direct, even cruel, when dealing with outsiders.

**3. Unjustified inferences:** We add information that is or was not there. Inferences from observations that we can make in our own society may be entirely irrelevant when we look at another society. In our society, for example, bathing once a week is considered dirty, and dirty is considered antisocial, and antisocial is very, very bad. But do we have a right to make such implications? Does dirty mean bad? And some cultures consider us rather dirty: The Japanese, for example, wash themselves completely before getting into a bath. Or, to take another example, ragged clothes may mean mental illness in the suburbs, but it just means


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poverty elsewhere.

This is often rooted in poor understanding: We seldom have all the information we need to understand another group of people. There are often reasons for "bizarre" behaviors that would make them seem less so. In some countries, for example, water is less plentiful and the dryness evaporates most of our perspiration. In poor countries, plumbing and clean water may be hard to find. In cold countries, bathing may be downright dangerous. We forget that our own grandparents rarely bathed more than once a week. Besides, in many places, people do not have the rather intense attitude we have about body smells – you don't have to be antiseptic to be clean.

It can also be a matter of self-fulfilling prophecies: People often become what we expect them to be. For a fat person, being "jolly" might mean acceptance, for example. For some ethnic groups, you show your pride by exaggerating your "ethnicity." American Indians of different tribes, for example, have adopted each others' dress, rituals, and art. And it's Dutch Americans who hang wooden shoes on their doors!

With all these pitfalls to something so normal as stereotyping, it is no wonder we have problems!

## Prejudice as Dissonance

All by itself, stereotyping can certainly lead to problems like discrimination. But it doesn't account for the heat, the anger, we often see among prejudiced people. Prejudice is often defined in terms of strong negative emotion – where does the emotion come from?

If you recall, distress comes from failure to anticipate – from incongruities and dissonance. Let's look at some of the incongruities that can lead to hatred:

**Disruption of daily routine:** People who are "different" can disrupt your life. In the English countryside, for example, there is a strong dislike for Gypsies. They pull into these quaint, quiet English villages in their caravans, park on the roadsides, live outside their wagons, make music and dance, sell their services, tell fortunes, steal... and generally throw the village into turmoil!

The simplest example: The "mentally ill" usually make us nervous. They behave so unpredictably!

**Threat to group security:** These outsiders may be a threat to more than just peace and quiet. Gypsies, for example, have earned at least some of their reputation for trouble. Guest workers in Europe may bring somewhat more violent cultural habits with them. City kids may bring more sexually promiscuous habits into the suburbs, etc., etc.

Understand that, while some of these fears may be based on unfounded stereotypes, some are quite legitimate concerns. The motivation for having our own groups in the first place is to keep life safe, simple, and predictable, and outsiders may threaten that social order.

**Threat to the pocketbook:** Economic well-being is a central concern for most people. But those whose economic well-being is threatened by outsiders are more likely to be angry about it. Historically, we find...

established groups against new groups;
older immigrant groups against newer immigrant groups;
poor whites in the old south vs poor blacks;
Irish railroad workers vs Chinese railroad workers;
Texas shrimpers vs Vietnamese shrimpers;
poor laborers vs welfare recipients;
established residents against guest-workers...

It is most often a matter of a poor, low-status group angry at a poorer, lower-status group that threatens to displace them.


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**Threat to group integrity or identity:** An ethnic group can be defined in many ways... skin color, religious practices, language, political beliefs, dress, celebrations.... When the things that define the group are compromised in some way, so that the future of the group is at stake, people get "nervous."

The future of the group is most clearly to be found in its children, and so we would expect that that's where much of our concern should be: What if they start acting like them? dressing like them? talking like them? believing what they believe? dating each other? marrying each other?

If your kid marries someone of a different religion, and their kids are raised in the other religion – your grandchildren are "lost" to you. You might as well have never had kids at all! Or what if you son marries a German girl and goes to live there. He and their kids are no longer Americans. Your own descendants are foreigners! Or if your grandchildren grow up speaking Spanish! (It is said that the best way to take away a person's culture is to take away his language. The Irish to the contrary, this often seems to be true.)

If your kid marries someone of a different race, what are your grandchildren? Black or white? The old tradition was that they were black, that the "blood" of the group with higher status was "tainted" by the blood of the group with the lower status. Today, children of biracial marriages are more likely to consider themselves biracial, which is certainly more enlightened. But think of the identity problem that comes with it when you live in a society that insists on classifying you one way or the other!

Maybe someday we'll all just consider ourselves human beings.

The preceding reasons for anger are, in fact, rather reasonable. They are problems that we may make efforts to address. There is another source of incongruity that is less reasonable: The inferiority complex.

There is something wrong with me – and you are reminding me of it! My poverty or ignorance or stupidity or lack of success or unhappiness or insecurity or sexual frustration or marital problems or whatever... are your fault. After all, before you came around, I didn't have these problems – or didn't notice them as much. Or perhaps I can't even figure out what is making me so angry – it certainly can't be myself, so it must be you!

Further, weak people, frustrated people, often seek to lose their embarrassingly tiny identities in their group identities. My group is great, so maybe a little of that greatness will rub off on me. And hatred of others helps to maintain the intensity of that group identity, just like our fervor for our favorite team becomes especially intense when the competition becomes intense!

The target of our anger may be a group which is causing us some real distress, such as economic competition or the other things mentioned above. Or it may simply be a traditional, socially-sanctioned target (a scapegoat). Either way, I've been told since childhood – by my mom, my dad, my friends, my teachers, my preachers, my television set – that we're better than you and that, therefore, I am better than you.

But there's that black guy with his Lincoln Continental – where did he get the money? And that woman, she's a lawyer – wonder what she did to pass the bar? And that Puerto Rican who gets all the girls – what do they see in that guy anyway?

Under every superiority complex, they say, hides an inferiority complex.

## Bigotry as Dissonance-Fixing

Much bigotry is just an effort to maintain the status quo: We're on top – let's keep it that way.

But, to the extent that our conceptions of another people are misconceptions, we will be confronted with contradictions. When we really look at these others, we see hints of their humanity, their needs, their talents, their good natures, the reasons for their behaviors, their ability to compete on an equal footing... and we need to defend against all this conflicting information.


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After all, nice people like us don't hurt other nice people! (Remember?)

The most basic thing to do would be denial: The information has to be much stronger to get through. For example, a woman may find that she has to work twice as hard to get recognition for her work.

Or we can engage in distortion. You can be labeled "the exception:" "One or two make it, every now and then." This is usually accompanied by an explanation: "His mother is white;" "She's terribly masculine, probably a Lesbian."

Another way to distort is to question the means by which someone succeeded: "All successful Italians got there through their mob connections;" "She slept her way to the top."

Another one, when you cannot question their capabilities, is to question their motives: "They become doctors for the money." A couple of Air Force officers told me once in all seriousness, "There are three kinds of women in the Air Force: Lesbians, nymphomaniacs, and the ones who are looking for husbands." In other words, they may be capable, but they certainly aren't noble or anything.

But there are worse ways to fix the dissonance:

Discrimination: Housing and jobs are the obvious ones. Less obvious is "institutional discrimination" – things that seem to be reasonable, but effectively discriminate anyway: literacy tests for voting, height requirements for police, trailer laws in English villages.... And don't forget the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy: If we deny certain people education, for example, they seem so ignorant, so perhaps we needn't bother to educate them; if we only permit them menial work, perhaps that's all their capable of; if we deny them access to decent housing, perhaps they like to live in squalor....

Further, we can threaten them (e.g. the Klan's cross-burnings), remove them (e.g. placing people on reservations or concentration camps), enslave them (e.g. forced labor, or economic enslavement, or just plain slavery), or simply destroy them (e.g. what the Nazi's attempted to do with Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and others).

Note: It's easy to say all this evil is due to a Nazi mentality, or to some flaw in whites or Europeans or males or whatever. But history shows that to be a prejudice in itself: No ethnic group, race, religion, government... has shown itself to be above these evils. When one group has power over another, that power seems to be – inevitably, perhaps? – abused. A pessimistic conclusion, I'm afraid.


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# Social Expectations

## Norms, Roles, and Status


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## Norms

Earlier, we talked about contrasts, beliefs, rules, and so on. We focused in on traits and the inferences we make from them. In this section, we are going to talk about another set of contrasts and the inferences they lead us to make. I call these sociocultural or shared expectations, and they include norms, roles, and status.

It's one of the great mysteries of the world that, while the laws of nature (like gravity) "weigh us down," their very consistency, their orderliness, their predictability, allows us to use them for our own ends. Knowing the laws of gravity and aerodynamics and so forth allows us to design and build airplanes that (in a sense) "free" us from those laws! Our power comes from our knowledge of that background of order.

The social world is also orderly. Social order doesn't have the necessity that physical order has, and while the force of law or custom may be powerful, ultimately we choose to conform or not. "You cannot have sex with your mother" is a powerful injunction, but it's still not quite as powerful as "You cannot walk through a brick wall." (Kelvin, p. 21)

Nevertheless, just like in the physical world, in order to act in the social world, we need some order. The social order is based on shared expectations (beliefs, rules, values) called norms.

Norms are used as standards with which we measure the appropriateness of behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, and even feelings, within the social group to which the norms are relevant. "Social group" may refer to an entire culture or society, a subculture or ethnic group, an organization or community, or even a club or gang.

The word norm is from the same root as "normal," and the simplest way of finding norms in some group or society is to see what the people consider to be normal. Normal (if you remember your basic statistics) means "what is highly probable" – and you could list various behaviors and ask people to rate them. (These ratings are known as subjective probabilities.)

How often do you brush your teeth? Never? Once a year? Once a month? Once a day? Twice a day? Three times a day? Every hour? Continuously? In our society, I believe, once or twice a day might be considered normal. A child might skip a day; a dental hygienist might brush after every meal and snack.

But note: A norm need not be what everyone says is right or good! We probably all should brush three times a day, and floss as well, but we don't – that wouldn't be considered "normal." Criminals may be abnormal, but so are saints!

On the other hand, sometimes the norm is not what most people do. It's interesting to compare what people think is normal with what actually is normal (statistically) in private domains such as sexuality! Not long ago, for example, society's norms still included taboos regarding masturbation, even while a majority of people engaged in the practice!

Norms, like habits, seem to maintain their own existence: "The behavior 'prescribed' by an informal norm is prescribed because it is deemed to be valid. This validity itself, however, is inferred from the frequency of occurrence of the behavior in question." (Kelvin, p. 87) So we brush our teeth once or twice a day because that is normal, and it is normal because we brush our teeth once or twice a day.

Note that one of the most common source of information about "frequency of occurrence" is tradition. So a norm such as "boys will wear pants; girls will wear skirts" is justified by saying "boys were meant to wear pants; girls were meant to wear skirts," and that in turn is justified by noting "It has always been so."

Beyond habit and tradition, a group or society may also reinforce norms with sanctions, that is, with rewards and (especially) punishments. Then, when norms and sanctions become formalized, they become rules, laws, judicial systems, penitentiaries, electric chairs, and so on.

The classic demonstration of normative behavior is Muzafer Sherif's. If I shine a pin-point of light on a wall in an otherwise pitch-black room, it would appear to move – an illusion called the autokinetic effect. If I were to ask you how far it moved, you could give a guess – 5 or 6 inches, perhaps. What Sherif did was to


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have a group of people view the dot and give their guesses outloud. While at first the guesses might differ by a few inches, with each repeated presentation of the light, their guesses would come closer together – that is, the group would develop a "norm."

If Sherif put a "stooge" – one of his assistants – in a group and instructed him to give an inflated guess (14 or 15 inches, for example), the group would tend to make higher guesses in response to the stooge. If the stooge stuck to his high guesses, he could bring the whole group up to his guess. Sherif even found that the artificially high norms could last for several "generations" of subjects: He would replace, after so many guesses, first the stooge, then others of the original group, with new people. The high norm would only slowly disappear.

So, in the real world, we have many norms that are no longer terribly helpful or relevant, that nevertheless last and last. There are lots of examples to be found in the relations between men and women!

## Conformity to norms

We tend to think of conformity to norms as being bad somehow–a sign of weakness, stupidity, even fascist slavishness. But, first of all, our lives are full of conformity to norms, much of which we don't even notice because we all conform! After all, conformity to norms is normal, by definition.

Take clothing: You may think of yourself as being highly individualistic, and may point out the great variety of styles around you. But notice instead the similarities: As you look around you at your fellow students, notice the jeans and t-shirts and preppy hand-me-downs. And what would happen if one of you came into class in a tuxedo, a chiffon evening gown, a bikini, nothing, a kimono or sari, in the clothing of the opposite sex... well, that wouldn't be "right," would it–perhaps a sign of mental illness. That is, we would make inferences, as in any act of person perception.

(Remember how wearing conventional clothes suggests to people that you are more trustworthy? Unconventional clothes suggest the opposite.)

Secondly, imagine what it would be like if everyone wore, did, spoke without regard to "styles," "traditions," norms–without regard to others' expectations? You'd be living in constant unpleasant unpredictableness. You've all met "unusual" people, people from whom you never quite know what to expect: Imagine if everyone acted that way. The mild irritation would mount to unbearable levels. It'd be what many people experience when they move to other parts of the world and don't know the norms: culture shock.

Imagine further what it would be like for young children, who are only just learning to anticipate people. Childhood would be even more painful than it already is. It is not for nothing that we maintain a certain comfortable regularity in our homes, that we don't act crazy in front of children, and that we all sometimes feel a nostalgia for the "simple life" of our home towns. Developmentally, we grow "into" our individuality from a base of consistency.

There are a number of different ways of describing norms. The simplest is to contrast prescribed and proscribed behavior. Prescribed behaviors are the "musts," the obligations, the things that make you a member of the group. Proscribed behaviors are the "must nots," the taboos. Small groups will kick you out if you do these things (like "no shoes, no service"). Societies tend to imprison, institutionalize, excommunicate, exile, or kill you.

Another way refers to the ideas of normality and probability mentioned before: The horizontal axis represents the variety of behaviors in question; the vertical axis the degree of normality:


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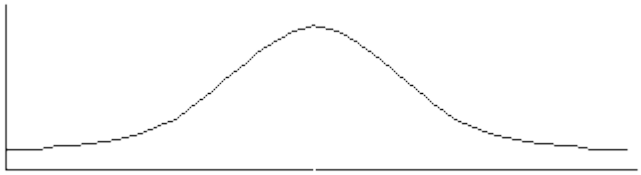
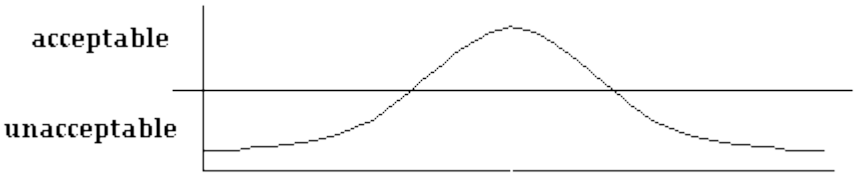


We need to add only one thing: a line that divides the acceptable from the unacceptable behaviors, so:




If we are looking at "appropriate dress for professors" as the behaviors, we might find tuxedos and evening gowns on one end of the curve, and swim suits or complete nakedness on the other end. In between, anything from blue jeans to three-piece pin-striped suits might be acceptable. And, perhaps, at the "peak" of acceptability, we might find the style I call "professorial chic" – for men, patches on jacket elbows, knit tie, hush puppies...; for women, wool skirts, peter pan collars, sensible shoes....

Sherif developed a third way of describing norms that compromises between the gradual curve and the abruptness of "prescribed-proscribed." There is a set of behaviors in a latitude of acceptance which are important to membership; there are also latitudes of rejection that include behaviors unacceptable to the group; and in between are neutral latitudes that include the irrelevancies:

A Lutheran, for example, might be comfortable with Episcopalian and Presbyterian church services, be non-committal about a Catholic mass on the one hand or a Methodist service on the other, place Greek Orthodox services beyond Catholic ones as sensual and mysterious, and Baptist services beyond Methodist ones as rather exuberant and excited.

Among the details that Sherif discovered in his research was that the more "ego-involvement" (i.e. passion) in the issues, the smaller the latitude of acceptance and larger the latitudes of rejection. A very intense Lutheran might not find any services other than his own acceptable.

And people who find themselves at one extreme or the other of a range tend to be more ego-involved. Extreme religious groups tend to be much fussier about what seems to others to be tiny details. In some ways it is easier, psychologically, to be an extremist: It takes less thought, less effort; You know. Moderates, on the other hand, tend to more tolerant, and more confused.

## Problems

Which brings us to some of the problems we find concerning norms. One problem is the disagreement about norms that we find when two groups or societies necessarily interact. Another problem is disagreement within a group or society as to the norms, or the latitudes, or the appropriate sanctions. Many petty squabbles, and quite a few major wars, are based on the social friction that occurs when norms are not agreed upon.

Once upon a time, we lived in small, isolated, and rather authoritarian societies: Norms were strong, tradition was strong, there was little conflict and little change. Even today much of the world's people live in what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developmental psychologistUrie Bronfenbrenner calls monolithic societies.

But nowadays, because of communications and education, we find ourselves more and more confronted with a great variety of norms – what Bronfenbrenner calls pluralism. The constant bickering typical of our society is one symptom. But so is, according to Bronfenbrenner, the development of higher values! It is difficult to develop a sophisticated value system for yourself if you haven't experienced a variety of value systems.

In monolithic cultures, norms are expected to be known and followed by everyone. E. T. Hall calls this high context: You have to be aware of millions of subtle little details in order to know what to do or how to read another person's behavior. A child in a monolithic culture learns the rules with his mother's milk, and the rules tend to be quite unconsciously adhered to. Japan is more monolithic or high context than we are, for example.

On the other hand, in pluralistic cultures, norms have to be pretty well spelled out – what Hall calls low context. There are fewer norms, they have to be consciously followed, and are often explicitly taught. Our own culture, especially when you get out of rural areas or the urban neighborhoods, is very pluralistic and low context.

## Roles

So, norms are shared expectations. Usually we think of these shared expectations as referring to general behavior expected of everyone in the group. But we can also have shared expectations concerning specific members of the group. We may expect them, and they may expect themselves, to perform a certain function, to play a certain role in the group. Roles are shared expectations concerning functions.

There are many different types of roles. For example, many roles are formal. In large groups (organizations, societies), these formal roles have titles and are used to refer to some category of people. "Doctor," for example, is a title we give to certain people, and we expect them to act in certain ways in certain situations. And they expect themselves to act so, too. Note that people who play certain roles may get together to form groups of their own, e.g. the American Medical Asociation.

There are also very tiny roles called low-level implicit positions that have no title, are very short-lived, are found only in certain highly specific circumstances, and may be quite flexible. "Giving the bride away" at a wedding is an example: It doesn't have its own title (like "maid of honor"); it occurs only at a specific point in the ceremony and lasts only a few minutes; it never carries over into, say, the reception; and the role, though usually played by the father of the bride, may be played by another person, or even by more than one person – both parents, for example.

Then there are roles so broad they get confused with biology. What is "woman," for example? A certain chromosome arrangement? Certain reproductive plumbing? Or is it a way of being loaded with all sorts of cultural expectations? It is more of the latter than most people realize.

One important thing about roles is that they come in pairs; role-relations are always reciprocal. We (non-doctors), when we find ourselves in certain situations in the presence of doctors, are expected to behave in certain ways. Doctors expect it of us; onlookers expect it of us; and we ourselves expect it of us. We take the role of patient.

This goes back to the idea of contrasts: To have doctor you must have patient; to have teacher you must have student; husband-wife; parent-child..., and all in reverse as well. Notice the embarrassment, or even pathology, of someone playing a certain role to the wrong person, or attempting to play it towards everyone.

In my definition I mentioned functions. For roles to be meaningful to people, they must have a function, a purpose, a task in the society or group; they do not refer to accidental or haphazard behaviors. The doctor is


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there for a purpose, as is the patient. It is the task or function that becomes our standard for evaluating the role-player: One can be a good doctor or a bad one, a good patient or a bad one, and so on.

But I must point out to you that many, perhaps most, of the behaviors associated with a role are more symbolic of purpose than truly purposeful – although the symbolic is always "purposeful" in that it tells us that a role is present. Why does the doctor wear a lab coat and write illegibly? Why does the banker wear a suit? The bride a wedding dress?

I also keep mentioning situations. Roles typically express themselves in the context of certain situations. At the hospital, in the examining room, at the scene of an emergency...these are appropriate situations to engage a doctor-patient role relationship. If the doctor asks you to remove your clothing at a cocktail party, you may be suspicious.

Roles also typically express themselves in the context of a performance. The doctor has examining room routines, the banker has certain paperwork, the bride has her wedding.... Notice again the amount of symbolism in the performance, beyond the actually task.

The performance may, however, be much more than symbolic: It may have functions of its own. Much of the examining room ritual, for example, is devoted to de-sexualization. We go out of our way to guarantee asexuality: The nurse at the door, the air conditioning one setting too cold, the cold, hard, plastic table with paper on it, the cold stethoscope, the rubber gloves, the uniforms, the diplomas on the walls... all help in making the intentions clear.

The lack of warmth exhibited by surgeons is another example: In order to deal with the realities of surgery, it seems necessary for most surgeons to keep themselves emotionally detached from the people they cut into! Note the age-old rule among surgeons that they never operate on family members.

Roles may have some specific prerequisites: to be a doctor, a certain education is expected, along with experience, licensing, etc. To be a bride, you must be a woman of a certain minimum age, not married to someone else, etc. Likewise, roles may also have certain consequences: The MD degree opens up a certain range of possibilities; being a bride results in a specific new role, that of wife.

## Problems

There are plenty of opportunities for problems regarding roles. First, we can have misunderstandings between people. For example, we may not realize we are supposed to be in a certain role relation – like when one of you thinks you're lovers, but the other doesn't. Or we may not know what the role entails, what the rules are, what others expect of us. Or we may both "know" but not agree!

Another source of trouble is that we normally have multiple roles in our lives, and these can conflict. A man, for example, may be a father and a policeman – tender and loving in the morning, tough and hard-nosed in the evening. Normally, this is not a problem–there are different people involved, situations, times... But what happens when the policeman catches his own son dealing drugs? Conflict!

Even one role can actually be many roles, depending on the contrasting role: A doctor acts one way towards patients, another towards nurses, a third way towards administrators, another way towards fellow doctors. But what happens when his patient is a fellow doctor? Or when his administrator tells him he must watch the budget while his nurses point out his humanitarian concerns? Conflict!

Finally, an individual can become confused about his or her roles. In the example of the policeman, what would happen if he began to act fatherly to all the juvenile delinquents on his patrol? Or if he began to bring home the tough cop role to his wife and kids? Many people have the problem of not being able to leave the job at work.


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## Status

Status is such a useful word, it is a pity that it is used in so many different ways. For our purposes, let's define it as "shared expectations regarding influence." Here's a fuller definition from Sherif: "Status is a member's position (rank) in a hierarchy of power relations in a social unit (group or system) as measured by the relative effectiveness of initiative (a) to control interaction, decision-making, and activities, and (b) to apply sanctions in cases of non-participation and non-compliance." Whew!

I used the word influence. This is what someone has when others change their beliefs or behaviors to fit his or hers. But, as you are no doubt aware, there are two kinds of influence: In the first kind, there are sanctions involved, either the use of them, the threat, or just the potential. This is called power.

Power has several sources. First, it may be rooted in skill , the knowledge you have that allows you to influence others. A master chess player controls his opponent by using his superior understanding of tactics and strategy; a master politician does the same through persuasion, manipulation, and gamesmanship.

Power can also derive from resources:  If you have wealth or weapons at your disposal, you have greater opportunity to apply sanctions. A gun makes for great obedience on the part of others.

And power can derive from legitimacy. Most people with power don't actually possess that much talent or resources. They are acknowledged as having power, and therefore influence, and therefore status, by others, who in turn have skills, resources, or legitimacy of their own. It serves their purposes to support the one, as it once served English barons to have a king: It provides a social order to work within.

The second source of influence is respect. This is "power" that is given to you by the people you influence; Rather than complying because of fear or greed, they follow you because of their admiration.

This too has several roots: The most powerful is the admittedly vague concept of attractiveness, often called "referent power." We give respect to people for the irrational reason of physical attractiveness, as well as the more rational reason of personal attractiveness. And we find them attractive not only on the basis of what they are, but on the basis of what they are in relation to us–i.e. their similarities to us. More of this in the future.

Another basis for respect is expertise ("expert power"). Skills and knowledge relevant to the task are a very rational reason to be influenced by someone. Note the difference here between the skills mentioned under power and those mentioned here: The first involve skills at influence, rather than at the task at hand. But notice that, when we compete with someone, the task is the competition, the influencing, and we may very well respect the other's ability to beat the pants off us!

And a last basis for respect is trustworthiness, a sense that the person is honest, has the best interests of others in mind, has no ulterior motives.

It is interesting to look back at recent presidents to see what might have been the basis of their success in becoming elected to the office: Kennedy and Reagan were certainly attractive, each in his own way. Johnson and Nixon were hardly that, but were considered expert politicians. Carter and Ford, in sharp contrast with Johnson and Nixon, were seen as trustworthy. I can't pin down Bush and Clinton so easily, perhaps because they haven't had time to become stereotyped in my mind as yet. But it isn't difficult to analyze the relative importance of the three characteristics for aspiring presidents!

There is one more basis for status and influence which doesn't clearly fall under either power or respect: Tradition. Status is clearly an aspect of norms in this regard. Why do you follow this person? I've always followed them. How else to explain the British monarchy, or the die-hard Republican or Democrat who has always voted so, regardless of the issues, the candidate's qualifications, or any other relevant concern.


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There are a number of points one should keep in mind about status: First of all, status is characteristically a part of a broader role, so all the things we've said about roles apply. Most roles involve some status differentiation (e.g. parent and child), and some roles are mostly a matter of status (e.g. chief, chairperson, president, etc.).

So, status involves the reciprocal nature of roles: In order to be king, you must have subjects; in order to be a doormat, you must have someone to walk all over you.... And it partakes of the symbolic, ritualistic character of roles, perhaps even more so, inasmuch as most pageantry celebrates status!

## Problems

Status also has its share of problems – perhaps more than its share!. First, there is uncertainty as to relative status. Just like roles, status is "in the minds" of the people involved, and so always hard to measure. The results of this uncertainty are all the power struggles we see around us every day.

A set of problems more unique to status derive from the distinction between status based on power and status based on respect: Sometimes people have no respect for the legitimate authority (national and office dictators, for examples); other times, we find the people we respect unable to achieve the power they need to get things done.

Generally, low status means low freedom: "The predictability of one's behavior is the sure test of one's own inferiority" (Crozier, 1964, quoted in Kelvin, p. 158). But influence also means responsibility. So status may in fact involve a restriction of freedom as well as the increase of freedom we normally expect with status. If your status is based on legitimacy, you must do right by all those who give you that legitimacy; if your status is based on respect, you must behave in a manner that upholds that respect; and if your influence is based purely on your wits and strength, you can never rest!


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# Conformity and Obedience


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## Defensive Conformity

Conformity is actually a rather complex concept, and there are a number of different kinds:

1. The conformity to norms we discussed earlier is often quite unconscious. It has been internalized (learned well), probably in early childhood. Our societal norms are seldom doubted; rather, we take them as givens, as "the way things are." The learning is supported throughout life by the "validity" of the norm – i.e. it works because it is the norm.
2. But sometimes we choose, consciously, to conform, as when we join a group voluntarily. We adopt certain norms because the group is attractive to us and we identify with the group and its values or goal. In its more dramatic forms, this is called conversion.
3. In other cases, we conform because we are forced to, i.e. we are conscious of our conformity but it seems a lot less voluntary. This is often called compliance, and it can be brought on by anything from a gun to the head or the promise of candy. In other words, it is conformity due to the sanctions the society or group has in effect.
4. But most of what we call conformity in the research literature concerns something "somewhat conscious" and "not quite voluntary." It is usually brought on by social anxiety – fear of embarrassment, discomfort at confusion, a sense of inferiority, a desire to be liked, and so on. I think it should be called defensive conformity.

The basic research on this kind of conformity has been conducted by Solomon Asch and his students:

Imagine that you have volunteered for a psychology experiment, and you show up at the lab at the promised time. There is a table with four chairs around it, three already occupied by other students. So you take the last chair and prepare yourself for some kind of psychological bizarreness. Finally, the experimenter comes in carrying two stacks of rather large cardboard cards. He introduces himself and thanks you for volunteering and begins to explain: One set of cards, as evidenced by the top card, shows three lines at a time, each line of a different length. The other set shows one line at a time. The task is called "line-length judgment" and looks to be very easy: Even from a distance, the line among the three that matches the single line is very clear.

So we begin. The experimenter points at the first student. He looks at the lines, hems and haws a bit... and chooses the wrong match! Oh well, there's one in every crowd. The experimenter just nods sagely to himself. He points at the second volunteer, and he too hems and haws... and chooses the wrong line! Now you begin to feel a bit uncomfortable. The experimenter points at the third person – your last chance – and he, too, chooses the obviously wrong answer. Now it's your turn. Being a person of integrity, you clearly announce the correct answer – at which point, all three volunteers and the experimenter give you a look like you're from outer space.

The experimenter reveals the second card of each stack, and starts again. And the students again start giving what to you seem like clearly wrong answers. But this time, when your turn comes, what do you do? Well, even in this rather unthreatening social situation, 35% of the time, subjects in this experiment gave what were clearly wrong responses. It's true that some 10% of the subjects never conformed; unfortunately another 10% conformed all the time or all but the first trial. And, although each of us firmly believes that they would be a part of that first 10% – last of the rugged individualists and all that – in fact, that's what everybody thinks. You don't quite know how you'll behave until you are there!

(Note: The other subjects were actually "stooges" or confederates of the experimenter – usually graduate assistants.)

Asch and his students did many variations of this study to find out which variables had significant effects on the amount of conformity:

1. The difficulty or ambiguity of the task. For example, we might make the differences between line


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lengths much smaller and so the correct answer much less certain. As you might guess, the conformity increases under those circumstances. A similar experiment by Shaw used the counting of metronome clicks. He found that the faster the metronome, the more conformity.

What is happening is that we have more and more need for the group's input as the task becomes more difficult. If in the earlier situation we conformed because we didn't wish to be embarrassed, in the more ambiguous situation, we also "conform" because we are less sure of ourselves and the others become sources of information. Some call this a change from normative pressures to conform to informational pressures to conform.

It might be better, though, to see it as the overlap between two very different processes altogether: On the one hand, we are addressing our need to be accepted by others (and other social needs); on the other hand, we are addressing our need for an accurate understanding of what is going on around us.

2. The relative perceived competence of the subject and the group. In one study, they had the subjects perform the line-judgement task alone first, and they were given feedback on how well they did: "You did really well" or "You aren't very good at this, are you?". The feedback, however, was random, i.e. had nothing to do with performance. In other words, the experimenter manipulated people's self-esteem.

   Then the subjects were put into the regular Asch situation. If they had been told that they had done well – i.e. felt competent – they conformed less. If they had been told that they had done badly – i.e. felt incompetent – they conformed more. Notice how this also involves a measure of need for information: If you are not competent at something, you turn to others for guidance.

   You can also manipulate the perceived competence of the group: Imagine going through the Asch situation with three guys wearing super-thick glasses, leaning forward, squinting furiously, and so on. If you believe them to be incompetent (at this task) you will conform less. Or we could do the reverse: Imagine being there with three architecture students, who should, of course, be rather good at lines....

3. Relative perceived status of the group and the subject. If the influence of competence involves the rational need for information, the influence of status is a lot less rational, and provides a clearer example of "defensive" conformity. If we are convinced that the group is of a higher perceived status (i.e. in our eyes), we conform more. If we are convinced they are of lower status, we conform less.

   This is true as well of groups conforming to individuals: If we see a high-status person crossing against a don't walk sign, we are much more likely to follow him than if we see a low-class person doing so. This is even more true when status is combined with competence: Who is it better to follow into New York City traffic, an alert young executive or a bum reeking of gin?

4. Group cohesiveness. If the group is composed of friends, we conform more. Although in one way we have, in a group of friends, the freedom to "be ourselves," our desire to be a cohesive group is a part of what made us friends to begin with!

   But we don't need to look only at our tendency to conform to groups we belong to; we also conform to groups we wish to belong to – our reference groups. The more the subject is attracted to the group, the more conformity. Imagine, for example, a fraternity pledge with a group of fraternity brothers.

   Perhaps the most important aspect of group cohesiveness is the sharing of goals. When the group has


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a common goal, there is more conformity. In one experiment, subjects were told that the group with the most accurate responses would win desirable theater tickets. You would think that everyone would make their most accurate guesses, even if the rest of the group seemed to disagree. Instead, we find more conformity than ever. Nobody wants to "stand out" when something of value is at stake. As the Japanese say, the nail that sticks out tends to get hammered!

5. Group composition. If the subject thinks that the group is made up of a number of different kinds of people, he or she will also conform more. If they were all the same, and they all made the same stupid mistake, you would figure, well, it must be something about them. (Remember attribution?) But if you're a student and next to you is a banker, and across from you is a housewife, and there at the end is bricklayer – what on earth could they all have in common to lead them to their bizarre behavior? It must be you who is mistaken, and so you conform.
6. Group size. The easiest variable to study is group size, but the results are disappointingly simple. Conformity is already high with 3 or 4 stooges; it gets a little higher with 6 or 7; it levels off at 15 or 16. Apparently, social pressures in the Asch situation don't increase linearly with group size.

   Contrast this, however, with the effects of large crowds on behavior (mob behavior.) If you've seen films of Hitler's rallies or large-scale religious revivals or ever been to a football game, you know that emotional behavior is highly contagious in large crowds. There is something about a crowd that leads to a sense of anonymity or even depersonalization: You lose your sense of individuality and let the mob carry you away.
7. Group unanimity. Group unanimity is perhaps the strongest variable in Asch's research. In the original studies, the stooges were always in unanimous agreement. All you need is one stooge that doesn't conform with the others, and the spell is broken. You may feel free to deviate. This is true even when the non-conforming stooge is still giving a wrong answer!

   This is a very important point. Most societies are very hard on non-conformists, because the non-conformist threatens the stability of the social structure. If the non-conformist exhibits his non-conformity with no negative results, others will follow. It is therefore the society's "duty" to make sure there are negative results! Mind you, this can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the society and the nature of the non-conformity.

## Cultural variables

1. Nationality. When we compare Norwegians and Frenchmen regarding their tendencies to conformity, we find that the Norwegians conform more than do the French. This is no surprise to people familiar with these cultures: The Norwegians have traditionally emphasized social responsibility (since the Viking days!); the French have an equally ancient tradition of particularly colorful individualism. (It is joked that if you want to pick a fight with a Frenchman, pick a subject!)
2. Alienation. The Japanese culture, like the Norwegian, tends to emphasize tradition, cooperation, and responsibility, and, like Norwegians, the Japanese tend to conform more than, say, Americans. But when Japanese college students were compared with American college students, it was found that they conformed less! In fact, they had a tendency to anticonformity,i.e. the tendency to give incorrect answers when the group is giving correct ones (just to be difficult, we might say).

   This is the effect of alienation. The Japanese students seemed to feel a bit lost, no longer a part of traditional Japanese culture, yet not a true part of the western culture that dominates university life and studies. We saw this same effect closer to home in the 1960's with the hippie movement: predominantly middle class students no longer felt a part of the dominant, success-oriented culture around them, and often defined themselves, not in terms of "this is what I am" but rather in terms of "I am not you," i.e. anticonformity.


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3. Assigned status. Assigned status is status that you are born with, status that is assigned to you by society without any reference to your desires or abilities. The low status that has been assigned to blacks, women, and various ethnic groups are clear examples.

   In the 1950's, it was found that, although there was no difference between whites and blacks in their overall tendency to conform, both black kids and white kids conformed more when the majority of the group they were in was white than when it was black. This goes back to things we've already looked at: relative perceived status and relative perceived competence, in the sense of the lower self-esteem that often accompanies low assigned status.

4. Gender differences. In the 1950's and 60's, research indicated almost invariably that women conform more than men. Social psychologists – at least the male ones – were ecstatic. After all, we don't come up with many results this strong in social psychology! But Sistrunk and McDavid (1971) reviewed the research and noticed something peculiar: The researchers were all male!

Sistrunk and McDavid started with 100 statements of opinion and fact, such as "Fords are better than Chevies," "cake is easier to make than pie," and "the earth moves around the sun." They then asked 53 people to judge whether a statement was "masculine" (e.g. "Fords..."), "feminine" (e.g. "cake..."), or "neutral" ("the earth..."). Any statement that 80% of the people agreed on was then included in a questionnaire. And with each statement, they included a fake (random) "majority response," e.g. "Most Americans agree."

They then gave the questionnaire to 270 male and female subjects. Here are the results: (The numbers represent "tendency to conform;" don't worry about the absolute number – just look at the differences and similarities.)

| | Masc. Items | Fem. Items | Neutral Items | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Males | 34.15 | 43.05 | 39.65 | 38.95 |
| Females | 42.75 | 34.55 | 39.10 | 38.80 |

What these figures mean is that, in our culture, women are quite conformist when it comes to sports and cars and other things they either don't know much about or don't care much about; and men are quite conformist about cooking and fashion and other things they don't know or care about. Otherwise, they conform about equally. The earlier results were due to the fact that the men constructing these studies used statements they found interesting – i.e. male ones!

## Obedience

Obedience is a very similar phenomenon to conformity. It can be distinguished by an emphasis on the impact of legitimacy (as opposed to other social pressures), and by the fact that it usually involves a single person – the authority.

The most famous study concerning obedience is Stanley Milgram's. Picture yourself in this situation: You have volunteered for a psychology experiment, so you find yourself at Dr. Milgram's office one evening. Another student is already there with Dr. Milgram. Dr. Milgram thanks you both for volunteering and explains that this is a study of the effects of punishment on learning. One of you will be the teacher and the other the learner. To decide, he asks each of you to pick a slip of paper out of a hat: Your slip says teacher, the other volunteer's slip says learner.

So you and Dr. Milgram take the learner to a small room next door, where you help the good doctor strap the learner into what looks like an electric chair. You then paste electrodes to various parts of his body.


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You and Dr. Milgram return to his office, where he puts you in front of a microphone, speaker, and a rather dangerous looking piece of electronic machinery with 30 toggle switches in a row along the bottom front, labeled from 30 volts to 450 volts. (The ones toward the end have a little sign above them that says "Danger: High Voltage!")

You are to read a list of nonsense syllables into the microphone to the learner in the next room, and he is to repeat them in the correct order back to you. If he makes a mistake, you are to pull the first switch. This switch will then lock in place, requiring you to use the next higher voltage if the learner makes a mistake the next time.

You read the list, and of course the learner makes a couple of mistakes, so you flick the first switch. You read the list again, but he makes a mistake again, so you flick the next switch. As you move up the line, the learner begins to complain. At 75 volts, he moans a bit. At 150 volts, he's begging to be let out of the experiment. Perhaps you turn to Dr. Milgram, who is sitting nearby correcting test papers, and ask him if it would be alright to stop. He explains that you both volunteered for this and he expects you both to complete the experiment.

At 180 volts, the learner is screaming that he can't stand the pain. You are shaking and sweating bullets. At 300 volts, you flick the switch and you hear the beginning of another scream form in the learner's throat, but it never quite comes out. When you read him the list again, he doesn't even attempt a response. He's unconscious! Perhaps he's even dead! You turn to Dr. Milgram for guidance, and he tells you: "No response is an incorrect response. Don't be concerned: There will be no permanent neurological damage. Please continue."

You continue to shock your fellow-volunteer all the way up to the maximum voltage of 450 volts, unaware, of course, that this was all a set-up and that the learner was a confederate of Dr. Milgram!

Before Milgram did this experiment, he asked several psychiatrists' opinions on what percentage of people would go how far. The psychiatrists (who we suppose would know about crazy behavior) suggested that most people would stop at 150 (when the learner asks to be let out), that only four percent would go up to 300, and that a mere one percent would go all the way to 450 volts.

In Milgram's study, 62 % went all the way.

This was quite a shock (no pun intended) to the psychological community (and well beyond!). This experiment was inspired by the Nurenburg trials, where Nazi officers would often plead that they were only following orders. People assumed that the kind of atrocities committed by these Nazis were the results of warped personalities encouraged by a warped culture, that red-blooded American men would never engage in those kinds of behaviors. We are, after all, rugged individualists! Milgram's study showed rather dramatically that we were not.

A knowledge of history, of course, would have made Milgram's study unnecessary: Obedience to authority and the atrocities that often go with it has been a part of human existence since as far back as we can go. Not very long ago, we have the Nazi example. More recently, we have Idi Amin's Uganda and Pol Pot's Cambodia, and "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. And even us red-blooded Americans have the massacre at Mai Lai in Vietnam on our conscience, not to mention the treatment received by Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants, and laborers over our mere two centuries of existence.

62 % is rather incredible. But let's say it's been exaggerated. Say it's only 10 %. Our population is roughly 250 million. 10 % of that is still 25 million, 25 million people who would follow orders to the point of hurting or even killing another human being.

When we combine this tendency to obey with immorality, lack of empathy, or sheer sadism.... A few years ago, the state of Texas advertised for two positions as lethal-injection executioners, paying $600 per death. They received over 30,000 applications. If the state of the world or the nation gets you down now and then, perhaps you should consider how well we are doing, given who we are working with!

Just like the Asch experiment, Milgram's has been altered to find the effects of other variables. One set of


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experiments looked at the effects of proximity of the learner. In the original experiment, the learner was in a separate room. What if he were in the same room, or right next to you? Or what if you actually had to touch the learner to apply the shock? As you might expect, proximity greatly reduced the amount of obedience: If they were in the same room, full obedience went down to 40%; if they were touching, it went down to 30%.

Milgram's original study was done at "a prestigious ivy-league school" (Yale). What if you did the experiment at a run-down office building in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut? Well, the percentage of full obedience goes down to 48 %.

In the original study, Milgram, PhD, professor, psychologist, scientist, sat there the entire time, the personification of authority. What if he weren't there? What if all the instructions were given over a phone? The absence of the authority figure reduced the full compliance to 21 %, including heart-breaking attempts to cheat by pretending to flick switches. Similarly, if an "ordinary" person were giving the orders, the obedience went down to 20%.

The variable that most reduced obedience, however, was the presence of an example of defiance. In this scenario, you see a fellow volunteer refuse to shock anyone before the start of the experiment. This reduces full compliance to 10 %. Again, the presence of a "non-conformist" has a powerful effect!

Other variables had little effect. Women were as likely to obey as men were. There were few major differences cross-culturally. And these studies aren't just restricted to the supposedly conformist 1950's: Recent studies show similar or even greater obedience today! (Meeus and Raaijmakers 1986, 1987)

Most of us would like to think that, in hard times, we would be freedom-fighters in the underground, or civil-rights marchers, or other such people-of-principle. Unfortunately, as people who have been in these situations will tell you, you don't really know how you'll act until you are in these situations. For most of us, disobedience of authorities or non-conformity to social pressures is very difficult. However, there is the enlightenment effect (or self-defeating prophecy): Knowing how difficult it is already gives you an edge.

## Non-Involvement

One more research area that has a strong relation to conformity is non-involvement, also known as bystander intervention research.

A favorite example of extreme non-involvement is the Kitty Genovese murder: At 3:00 in the morning, over a period of 30 minutes, Kitty Genovese was attacked three times in the courtyard of her apartment building. The man first mugged her, left, then returned to rape her, left again, and finally returned to kill her. This entire tragedy was witnessed, and her screams for help heard, by 38 of her neighbors, none of whom came to her rescue or even phoned to police!

The response to this was the usual: "Typical for New York City;" "Could never happen here;" and "It would have been different if I had been there." Social psychologists Bibb Latane' and John Darley and several of their students decided to put these assertions to the test.

In one of their studies, the volunteer was asked to wait for the experimenter in a waiting room. In this waiting room, there were already two students, reading magazines. After the volunteer had settled into his chair, a puff of smoke would enter the room through a crack in the wall near the volunteer. The other students (stooges, of course) showed no reaction. The puff became a stream; the stream became a flood; and eventually you couldn't see the other side of the room. Through all this, the stooges remained in their seats, reading their magazines... and so did most of the volunteers!

In fact, only 10% of the students responded within 6 minutes. Even if they used three actual students – i.e., people who were not instructed to do nothing – only 12 1/2 % responded. When alone, 75% of the students responded within 6 minutes.


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Another experiment, by Bibb Latane and Judith Rodin, is even more dramatic. A female experimenter asks the volunteer to fill out a questionnaire, as another student is also (apparently) doing, and retreats behind a curtain into what appears to be a storage room. As the volunteer fills out the form, he or she hears the experimenter climbing a step ladder and struggling with what are apparently heavy boxes. Suddenly, she falls: the ladder clatters and her body thumps onto the concrete floor, and she cries out "Oh my God, my foot... I.. I can't move it!" This goes on for about a minute. The other student continues to fill out the form. So do 80% of the volunteers!

When with someone who doesn't respond to an apparent emergency, only 20% of us do respond. Even when we are alone, only 70% respond. It really makes you wonder about the other 30%, doesn't it? Are they so afraid of embarrassment that they can't even get up to ask if the experimenter is okay?

Well, it seems to be a bit more than a fear of embarrassment going on here – although embarrassment is likely a component. First, most people seem to experience a degree of empathic fear – a combination of identifying with the victim and being uncertain about what to do that causes many people to freeze or panic.

Robert Baron found that, when a victim is in pain and the subject felt that they could do something to ease the pain, then the more pain the victim shows, the more quickly the subject responds. But when the victim is in pain and the subject did not know what to do, the more pain, the more slowly the subject responds.

So, if we get a bit nervous and aren't sure what to do, and there are other people around, we often hope that they will be the ones to respond, so we don't have to. In fact, the more people around, the less likely it is that we will respond. This seems to have been very much a part of the Kitty Genovese case: The apartments formed a U around the courtyard, so the residents could see each others' lights come on and window blinds open. Many of them simply assumed that someone else must have called the police.

If you think about it, it is rather logical: If I am there alone, I have 100% of the responsibility, and I should certainly help. If I am there with one other person, I have 50% of the responsibility, and I can flip a coin. But if I am there with 100 other people, I have only 1% of the responsibility, so it would be terribly presumptuous of me to try to help (and potentially terribly embarrassing!). They call this diffusion of responsibility.

And there are the purely selfish reasons for not helping: Some of Kitty Genovese's neighbors admitted that they didn't want to get involved – the costs of involvement are too great. If you went out to help, you yourself could get hurt or killed (or sued, as occasionally happens to people who interfere in "domestic arguments.") Even if you only called the police, there'd be statements to make, line-ups to attend, trials to testify at, and possibly even retribution from the criminal, were he to get off on a technicality, say.

(Keep in mind that this is a world where a man who was attempting to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a New York subway train successfully sued New York City, the subway system, and the brakeman who managed to stop the train in time, for millions of dollars!)

Now most of us like to think of ourselves as nice people, even if we do freeze, panic, leave things to others, or take care of ourselves first. So we have to make sure to justify our decisions. This is most easily done by the distortion of reality called reinterpretation of the situation.

For example, on Fifth Avenue in New York City, in broad daylight, a woman named Eleanor Bradley broke her leg while shopping. She lay there in shock for 40 minutes before someone helped her, while literally hundreds of people walked around her! Obviously, people explained her away: It can't be serious, she's probably a drunk, she's crazy, she's play acting, this is a Candid Camera stunt, whatever.

This is strongly reinforced by the diffusion of responsibility tendency mentioned above: If it were serious, all these other people wouldn't be walking around her, would they? We use others as a source of information, as well as bending to fears of embarrassment or desires to belong.

It might be valuable to consider ways we could counteract these unfortunate tendencies in ourselves. Some good clues can be found in Leonard Bickman's studies. In one, for example, people were engaged in a (phony) experiment involving the use of intercoms. They then heard a crash and screams over the intercom.


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Those subjects who thought everyone in the experiment was in same building tended to stay where they were; those who thought that only they and the victim were in the same building tended to try to get help.

In another study by Bickman, again using intercoms, a third of the subjects heard screams over the intercom, another third heard screams followed by the voice of a witness getting upset, and the last third heard the scream and the witness define the situation as an emergency. The first third were least likely to help, and the last third most likely.

Precisely because of their artificiality, these studies serve to emphasize that things like diffusion of responsibility and redefining the situation are, in fact, "in the mind of the bystander." We can therefore directly counter these tendencies by simply developing certain habits: Assume personal responsibility (unless someone more qualified is clearly present), and assume that the situation is an emergency (until you know better).

The problem of empathic fear also has a solution: Develop emergency competence. In a number of studies, it has been found that people with some knowledge of emergency procedures are much more likely to help, even in emergencies for which they were not trained! They, like professionals, don't lose their heads in emergencies.

Again, the enlightenment effect or self-defeating prophecy will play its part with you: Just knowing that we tend not to help makes it more likely that you will help. It may wreck future social psychology experiments, but it may save future Kitty Genoveses.

## Non-Conformity

If conformity is, quite literally, normal, then non-conformity is, for better or worse, abnormal or deviant. But you can be abnormal in many different ways:

### Mental Illness

When people act strangely, one of the easiest things to do is to label them mentally ill. Many people, sadly, get this label only because they are irritating, annoying, or troublesome to others, especially when the others have power and the one getting labeled does not. They don't do what they are supposed to do, so we send them off to therapy or, better yet, an institution.

This is not to say that there is no such thing as mental illness. "True" mental illness usually carries the connotation that the behaviors, experiences, thoughts, or feelings that are so troublesome are not completely under that person's control. Someone who is eccentric, or a political dissident, or a criminal presumably chooses to do what they do. The mentally ill person is not completely free to choose, and is therefore not fully responsible.

Problems that have (1) strong genetic components to them (such as schizophrenia is believed to have), or ones involving (2) damage to the nervous system, (3) psychological traumas, (4) long-term conditioning, or (5) addiction, are more likely candidates for the term mental illness.

This doesn't make it that much easier to distinguish mental illness from other forms of non-conformity: We are, for example, far from establishing clear methods for distinguishing biological from psychological causes. Many people believe that criminals behave as they do because of early traumas and social conditioning. In the former Soviet Union, people with dissenting political opinions were considered insane, since political opinions are, at least in part, established through long-term conditioning. Further, culture itself is a matter of long-term conditioning. And people of principle – Saint Francis is a particularly good example, or the student that stood in front of the tanks in Tienamen Square – often act in ways most of us would consider insane!


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One thing I should make clear at this point: We are, throughout this section, talking about deviation from norms, not from normality. Many unusual things are not considered deviant (red hair, for example) and some are even valued (beauty, intelligence, strength....).

## Criminality

When non-conformity refers to formalized norms such as laws, we call it crime. It is usually assumed that crime is committed by choice, so that demonstrating mental incompetence, lack of intent, accident, or circumstances justifying the act will at least diminish the degree of guilt.

Some criminals can be understood as being undersocialized. They never developed much of a conscience or superego, perhaps because of a childhood filled with neglect, abuse, poverty, and so on. It is also possible that they lacked, from the beginning, the basic capacity for empathy that some consider the foundation for a conscience.

These people are sometimes called sociopaths. An older term was psychopath, but today that tends to bring images of the most extreme cases only. They have little concern for people's feelings, much less for society's norms and laws. Self-centered, they want what they want when they want it, and get what they want assuming they have sufficient skills to do so. We sometimes glorify them – Billy the Kid, Bonny and Clyde, and so on – as true non-conformists. But generally we see them as on the borders of mental illness, or past them.

Similar to these are the criminals who may well have a well-developed conscience, but who also have very demanding needs. A drug addict who steals to support his or her habit is one example. Someone who steals in order to eat might be another.

But many criminals are not truly non-conformist at all. Instead they conform to a different set of norms. That is to say, they belong to a criminal subculture. If you are brought up to believe that stealing is fine in many situations that the dominant culture finds criminal, or that killing someone for revenge is a moral duty, not a mortal sin, then it is the strength of your conformity that is the problem! Examples might include crime "families," urban gangs, and groups like the klan.

There are also people who define themselves negatively, that is, as whatever other people are not. This is anticonformity again, and may account for a great deal of purely destructive behavior such as vandalism. Some groups make anticonformity a part of their norms, so that throwing beer cans on people's lawns or spray painting your name everywhere or knocking over grave stones becomes "the thing to do."

The problems created by criminal subcultures and anticonformity can be made worse by the alienation that many of the people involved feel. If there is no place for urban youth to fit in, for example, their need for identity and belonging will make their commitment to the criminal subculture and the desire to strike out against the mainstream culture all the stronger. Note, for example, the increase in neo-Nazi or skinhead activity in Germany as unemployment and the influx of immigrant labor increased. Especially dangerous are those individuals whose weak personalities make them particularly desperate for membership and recognition from any source!

## Self-actualizers

Some people who are different are mentally ill or criminals. Most people who are different are just conforming to different sets of norms – i.e. they aren't "non-conformists" at all! But a few people are truly independent of conformity pressures and use their freedom for the good. The term that has become popular for these people is self-actualizers.

Abe Maslow believed that, when you are no longer pushed around by your physical needs, by your fears, by your social anxieties, or by your inferiority complexes, you are essentially free to do what you want to do – you are free to "be all that you can be." You are a self-actualizer.


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Maslow reviewed the lives of a number of people he felt were prime examples of self-actualizers, including some famous people such as Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt. He ended up with a list of characteristics these people seemed to have in common. I'm not going to give them all, but a number of them are quite significant to the idea of non-conformity at its best.

Self-actualizers strive for (1) autonomy and independence, and they (2) resist enculturation, that is, the social pressures most of us can't seem to resist. They are not impressed by authority or fashion. Instead, they rely on themselves, their values, conscience, reason, and experience.

They have (3) democratic values, meaning that they are open to and comfortable with cultural and individual variety. But they are not just tolerant, they are actually drawn towards variety. And they are more (4) accepting of others and themselves, as they are rather than as anyone says they should be.

More subtle indications of their non-conformity are their preferences for (5) spontaneity over the contrived or the calculated, and (6) simplicity over pretense and artificiality. They have the ability to (7) appreciate things that others take for granted, and a capacity for (8) creativity that allows them to rise above the mundane. All this doesn't mean we are dealing with someone flamboyant, however, or with radical non-conformists: Their love of simplicity often means that they appear rather ordinary on the surface, and their ability to accept self and others often means accepting much of the social order as it is.

But non-conformity is not, by any means, the only quality of the self-actualizer: They also enjoy warm (9) intimate relations with a few friends, and have a great capacity for (10) Gemeinschaftsgefühl – social concern. In fact, running parallel to the element of non-conformity in their personalities is an even more important element of compassion.


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# Sociobiology


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## Instinct

A decent way to conceive of learning is to think of us as clay that is changed by circumstances, and then approaches future circumstances a little differently from before. Too hard, like stone, and the organism can't accept changes, can't learn; too soft, like sand, and the changes in the organism can have no effect on its environment.

We find that the proportion of changeable to unchangeable aspects of organisms – sand to stone – increases as we get closer to human beings. Simple creatures, in fact, seem to have all or most of their "contrasts" built-in to them, whereas more advanced creatures (like ourselves, we like to think) depend more on learning.

But even we have some of these "built-in" contrasts – reflexes, for example, and the structure of the retina, and even perhaps a couple of instincts.

Let's begin with an example of instinctual behavior in animals: The three-spined stickleback is a one-inch long fish that one can find in the rivers and lakes of Europe. Springtime is, as you might expect, the mating season for the mighty stickleback and the perfect time to see instincts in action.

Certain changes occur in their appearances: The male, normally dull, becomes red above the midline. He stakes out a territory for himself, from which he will chase any similarly colored male, and builds a nest by depositing weeds in a small hollow and running through them repeatedly to make a tunnel. This is all quite built-in. Males raised all alone will do the same. We find, in fact, that the male stickleback will, in the mating season, attempt to chase anything red from his territory (including the reflection of a red truck on the aquarium's glass).

But that's not the instinct of the moment. The female undergoes a transformation as well: She, normally dull like the male, becomes bloated by her many eggs and takes on a certain silvery glow that apparently no male stickleback can resist. When he sees a female, he will swim towards her in a zigzag pattern. She will respond by swimming towards him with her head held high. He responds by dashing towards his nest and indicating it's entrance. She enters the nest, her head sticking out one end, her tail the other. He prods at the base of her tail with rhythmic thrusts. She releases her eggs and leaves the nest. He enters and fertilizes the eggs, and then, a thorough chauvinist, chases her away and waits for a new partner.

What you see working here is a series of sign stimuli and fixed actions: His zigzag dance is a response to her appearance and becomes a stimulus for her to follow, and so on. Perhaps I'm being perverse, but doesn't the stickleback's instinctive courtship remind you of some of our human courtship rituals? I'm not trying to say we are quite as mindless about it as the stickleback seems to be – just that some similar patterns may form a part of or basis for our more complex, learned behaviors.

Ethologists – people who study animal behavior in natural settings – have been studying behaviors such as the sticklebacks' for over a century. One, Konrad Lorenz, has developed an hydraulic model of how an instinct works, illustrated below. We have a certain amount of energy available for any specific instinctual system, as illustrated by the reservoir. There is a presumably neurological mechanism that allows the release of some or all of that energy in the presence of the appropriate sign stimulus: The valve, spring, scale, and weight. There are further mechanisms – neurological, motor, hormonal – that translate the energy into specific fixed actions: The tray and its various spouts. Today, we might suggest that energy is a poor metaphor and translate the whole system into an information processing one – each era has it's favorite metaphors. But the description still seems sound.


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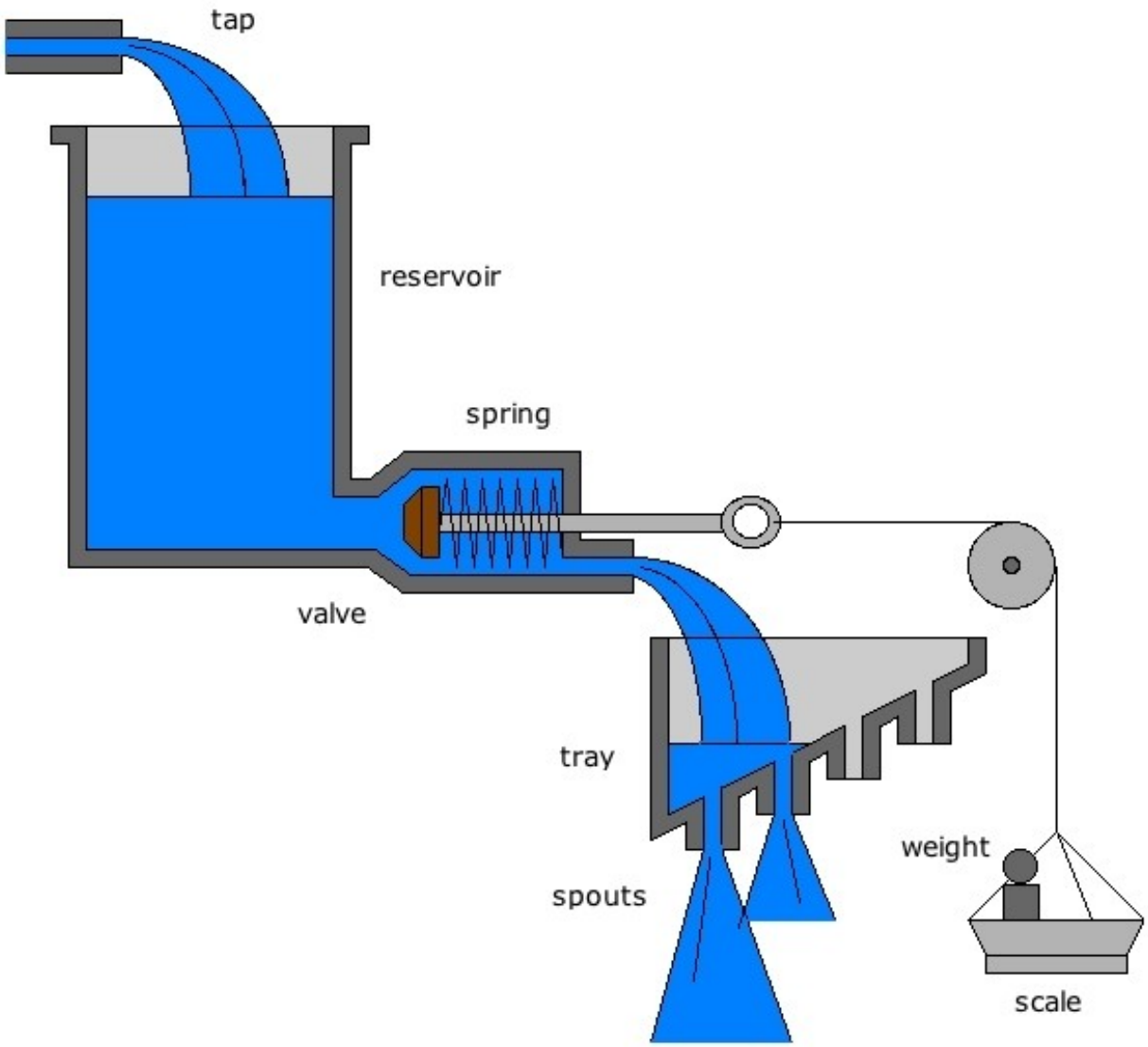


Does any of this apply to human courtship and sexual behavior? I leave it up to you. But what about other examples? Two possibilities stand out:

1. There are certain patterns of behavior found in most, if not all, animals, involving the promotion of oneself, the search for status or raw power, epitomized in aggression. Let's call this the assertive instinct.
2. There are other patterns of behavior found in, it seems, somewhat fewer species, involving care for someone other than oneself, epitomized in a mother's care for her babies. Let's call this the nurturant instinct.

A number of biologists have begun to investigate the way some of the motivated behaviors we have been discussing came into being. In psychology, we normally look for the proximate causes of things, that is, we look at the immediate situations, perhaps recent behaviors or attitudes, at most a person's childhood upbringing. Sociobiologists, on the other hand, look at distal causes, that is, at the evolution of social behavior.

The basics of evolution are quite simple. First, all animals tend to over-reproduce, some having literally thousands of offspring in a lifetime. Yet populations of animals tend to remain quite stable over the generations. Obviously, some of these offspring aren't making it!


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Second, There is quite a bit of variation within any species. Much of the variety is genetically based and passed on from one generation to another. included in that variety are traits that help some individuals to survive and reproduce, and other traits that hinder them.

Put the two ideas together, and you have natural selection: Nature encourages the propagation of the positive traits and discourages the negative ones. As long as variety continues to be created by sexual recombination and mutation, and the resources for life remain limited, evolution will continue.

One sociobiologist, David Barash, suggests a guiding question for understanding possible evolutionary roots of any behavior: "Why is sugar sweet", that is, why do we find it attractive? One hypothesis is that our ancestors ate fruit to meet their nutritional needs. Fruit is most nutritious when it is ripe. When fruit is ripe, it is loaded with sugars. Any ancestor who had a taste for sugar would be a little more likely to eat ripe fruit. His or her resulting good health would make him or her stronger and more attractive to potential mates. He or she might leave more offspring who, inheriting this taste for ripe fruit, would be more likely to survive to reproductive age, etc. A more general form of the guiding question is to ask of any motivated behavior "How might that behavior have aided ancestral survival and/or reproduction?"

A curious point to make about the example used is that today we have refined sugar – something which was not available to our ancestors, but which we discovered and passed on to our descendants through learned culture. It is clear that today a great attraction to sugar no longer serves our survival and reproduction. But culture moves much more quickly than evolution: It took millions of years to evolve our healthy taste for sugar; it took only thousands of years to undermine it.

## The Sociobiology of Attraction

Let's start by looking at mate selection. It is obvious that we are drawn to "affiliate" with some people more than others. Sociobiologists have the same explanation for this as for everything else, based on the archetypal question "why is sugar sweet?" We should be sexually attracted to others whose characteristics would maximize our genetic success, that is, would give us many healthy, long-lived, fertile children.

We should find healthiness attractive and, conversely, illness unattractive. We should find "perfect" features attractive, and deformities unattractive. We should find vitality, strength, vigor attractive. We should find "averageness" attractive – not too short, not too tall, not too fat, not too thin.... Quasimodo, for all his decency, had a hard time getting dates.

We are also attracted to certain people for less "logical" reasons, such as the degree to which they have strong masculine or feminine physical – and behavioral – characteristics. Women prefer men who are taller, with broad shoulders, a square jaw.... Men prefer women who are shorter than themselves, softer, rounder....

These differences between the sexes is known as sexual dimorphism, and the process that leads to these differences is called sexual selection. Small functional differences between the sexes can become large nonfunctional ones over many generations. If female birds are instinctively inclined to prefer colorful males – perhaps because colorful males have served to distract predators from ancestral females and their chicks – then a male that is more colorful will have a better chance, and the female with a more intense attraction to color a better chance, and their offspring will inherit their colors and intense attraction to colors and so on and so on... until you reach a point where the colors and the attraction are no longer a plus, but become a minus, such as in the birds of paradise. Some males cannot even fly under the weight of all their plumage.

Human beings are only modestly dimorphic. But boy are we aware of the dimorphisms!

The dimorphism is also found in our behaviors. David Barash puts it so: "Males tend to be selected for salesmanship; females for sales resistance." Females have a great deal invested in any act of copulation: the limited number of offspring she can carry, the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth, the increased nutritional requirements, the danger from predators...all serve to make the choice of a mate an important consideration.


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Males, on the other hand, can and do walk away from the consequences of copulation. Note, for example, the tendency of male frogs to try to mate with wading boots: As long as some sperm gets to where it should, the male is doing alright.

So females tend to more fussy about who they have relations with. They are more sensitive to indications that a particular male will contribute to their genetic survival. One of the most obvious examples is the attention many female animals pay to the size and strength of males, and the development of specialized contests, such as those of antlered and horned animals, to demonstrate that strength.

There are less obvious things as well. In some animals, males have to show, not just strength, but the ability to provide. This is especially true in any species which has the male providing for the female during her pregnancy and lactation – like humans! Sociobiologists suggest that, while men find youth and physical form most attractive, women tend to look for indications of success, solvency, savoir-faire. It might not just be a cultural fluke that men bring flowers and candies, pay for dinner, and so forth.

Further, they suggest, women may find themselves more interested in the "mature" man, as he is more likely to have proven himself, and less interested in the "immature" man, who presents a certain risk. And women should be more likely to put up with polygyny (i.e. other wives) than men with polyandry (other husbands): Sharing a clearly successful man is better in come cases than having a failure all to yourself. And, lo and behold, polygyny is even more common than monogamy, while polyandry is found in perhaps two cultures (one in Tibet and the other in Africa), and in both it involves brothers "sharing" a wife in order not to break-up tiny inherited properties..

Taking it from the other direction, males will tolerate less infidelity than females: Females "know" their children are theirs; males never know for sure. Genetically, it matters less if males "sow wild oats" or have many mates or are unfaithful. And, sure enough, most cultures are harder on women than men when it comes to adultery. In most cultures, in fact, it is the woman who moves into the husband's family (virilocality) – as if to keep track of her comings and goings.

From our culture's romantic view of love and marriage, it is interesting to note that in most cultures a failure to consummate a marriage is grounds for divorce or annulment. In our own culture, infertility and impotence are frequent causes of divorce. It seems reproduction is more important than we like to admit.

Of course, there is a limit to the extent to which we generalize from animals to humans (or from any species to any other), and this is especially true regarding sex. We are very sexy animals: Most animals restrict their sexual activity to narrowly defined periods of time, while we have sex all month and all year round; In most species there is little sign of female orgasm and even the male involvement is of very short duration, while we engage in sex with great enthusiasm for prolonged periods of time; And no other species apparently conceives of sex as pure entertainment.

We can only guess how we got to be this way. Perhaps it has to do with the long-term helplessness of our infants. What better way to keep a family together than to make it so very reinforcing!

## Children

That brings us to children, our attraction to them, and their attraction to us. Adults of many species, including ours, seem to find small representatives of their species, with short arms and legs, large heads, flat faces, and big, round eyes... "cute" somehow – "sweet," the sociobiologist might point out. It does make considerable evolutionary sense that, in animals with relatively helpless young, the adults should be attracted to their infants.

The infants, in turn, seem to be attracted to certain things as well. Goslings, as everyone knows, become attached to the first large moving object they come across in the first two days of life – usually mother goose (occasionally Konrad Lorenz or other ethologists). Human infants respond to pairs of eyes, female voices, and touch.

The goslings respond to their sign-stimulus with the following response, literally following that large moving


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object. Human infants, of course, are incapable of following, so they resort to subterfuge: the broad, full bodied, toothless smile which parents find overwhelmingly attractive.

Sociobiologists go on to predict that mothers will care for their children more than fathers (they have more invested in them, and are more certain of their maternity); that older mothers will care more than younger mothers (they have fewer chances of further procreation); that we will be more solicitous of our children when we have few (or only one!) than when we have many; that we will increase our concern for our children as they get older (they have demonstrated their survival potential); and that we will tend to push our children into marriage and children of their own.

### Helping

Care – helping behavior – is likely when it involves our children, parents, spouses, or other close relations. It is less and less likely when it involves cousins or unrelated neighbors. It is so unusual when it involves strangers or distant people of other cultures and races that we recall one story – the good Samaritan – nearly 2000 years after the fact.

Sociobiologists predict that helping decreases with kinship distance. In fact, it should occur only when the sacrifice you make is outweighed by the advantage that sacrifice provides the genes you share with those relations. The geneticist J. B. S. Haldane supposedly once put it this way: "I'd gladly give my life for three of my brothers, five of my nephews, nine of my cousins...." This is called kin selection. Altruism based on genetic selfishness!

Another kind of "altruistic" behavior is herd behavior. Some animals just seem to want to be close, and in dangerous times closer still. It makes sense: By collecting in a herd, you are less likely to be attacked by a predator. Mind you, sometimes you may find yourself on the outside of the herd – but the odds are good that the next time you'll be snugly inside. It's a trade-off called reciprocal altruism. Some animals help any member of their on species, with the instinctual "understanding" that they may be the beneficiaries the next time they need help themselves.

Robert Trivers has suggested that people engage in a more sophisticated form of reciprocal altruism, shared only with a few of the more advanced creatures of the world. Here you would be willing to sacrifice for someone else if it is understood that that other will do the same for you, or reciprocate in some other way, "tit for tat." Clearly, this requires the ability to recognize individuals and to recall debts!

Other geneticists have pointed out that, if there is a genetic basis for reciprocal altruism, their will also be some individuals that cheat by allowing others to do for them without ever meeting their own obligations. In fact, depending on the advantages that reciprocal altruism provides and the tendency of altruists to get back at cheaters, cheaters will be found in any population. Other studies have shown that "sociopathy," guiltless ignoring of social norms, is found in a sizable portion of the human population.

There is, of course, no need for a human being to be 100% altruist or 100% cheat. Most of us (or is it all of us?), although we get angry at cheats, are quite capable of cheating when the occasion arises. We feel guilt, of course, be we can cheat. A large portion of the human psyche seems to be devoted to calculating our chances of success or failure at such shady maneuvers. More on this later.

## The Sociobiology of Aggression

Like many concepts in social psychology, aggression has many definitions, even many evaluations. Some think of aggression as a great virtue (e.g. "the aggressive businessperson"), while others see aggression as symptomatic of mental illness.

The fact they we do keep the same word anyway suggests that there is a commonality: Both positive and


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negative aggression serve to enhance the self. The positive version, which we could call assertiveness, is acting in a way that enhances the self, without the implication that we are hurting someone else. The negative version, which we might call violence, focuses more on the "disenhancement" of others as a means to the same end.

Although the life of animals often seems rather bloody, we must take care not to confuse predation – the hunting and killing of other animals for food – with aggression. Predation in carnivorous species has more in common with grazing in vegetarian species than with aggression between members of the same species. Take a good look at your neighborhood cat hunting a mouse: He is cool, composed, not hot and crazed. In human terms, there is not the usual emotional correlate of aggression: anger. He is simply taking care of business.

That taken care of, there remains remarkably little aggression in the animal world. But it does remain. We find it most often in circumstances of competition over a resource. This resource must be important for "fitness," that is, relevant to one's individual or reproductive success. Further, it must be restricted in abundance: Animals do not, for example, compete for air, but may for water, food, nesting areas, and mates.

It is the last item – mates – that accounts for most aggression in mammals. And it is males that are most noted for this aggression. As we mentioned earlier, females have so much at stake in any act of copulation – so many months gestation, the increased energy requirement, susceptibility to attack, the dangers of birth, the responsibility of lactation – that it serves their fitness to be "picky" when looking for a partner. If females are picky, males must be show-offs: The male must demonstrate that he has the qualities that serve the female's fitness, in order to serve his own fitness. Deer are a good example. Mind you, this need not be conscious or learned; in all likelihood, it is all quite instinctual in most mammals. It may possibly have some instinctual bases in us as well.

Some of his aggressiveness may in fact be mediated by testosterone, the "male" hormone. Inject testosterone into female mice and their threshold for aggressive behavior goes down. Remove testosterone from male mice (by castrating the poor things) and their thresholds go up. But I must add that testosterone does not cause aggression, it just lowers the threshold for it.

But females in many species can be quite aggressive (such as female guinea pigs), and females in any species can be extremely aggressive in certain circumstances (such as when facing a threat to her infants). In human societies, the sociological statistics are clear: Most violent crime is committed by men. But we have already noticed that, as women assert their rights to full participation in the social and economic world, those statistics are changing. Time will tell the degree to which testosterone is responsible for aggression in people.

Nevertheless, males engage in a great deal of head-butting. But one can't help but notice that these contests "over" females seldom end in death or even serious injury in most species. That is because these contests are just that: contests. They are a matter of displays of virtues, and they usually include actions that serve as sign stimuli to the opponent that the contest has ended in his favor: surrender signals. Continued aggression is of little advantage to either the loser or the winner. Even male rattlesnakes don't bite each other!

Territoriality and dominance hierarchies – once thought to be major focuses of aggressive behavior – are relatively less significant. Animals tend to respect territorial and status claims more than dispute them. It is only when circumstances, whether natural or humanly created, are out of the ordinary that we see much aggression. And low food supplies likely have little to do with aggression. Southwick, studying Rhesus monkeys in the London Zoo, found that reducing the food supplies by 25% had no effect on the amount of aggression found, and reducing the food supplies by 50% actually decreased aggression! We find the same thing among primitive people.

## Human Beings

So why so much aggression in people? One possibility is our lack of biological restraints. Sociobiologists predict that animals that are poorly equipt for aggression are unlikely to have developed surrender signals. Man, they say, is one of these creatures. But we developed technology, including a technology of


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destruction, and this technology "evolved" much too quickly for our biological evolution to provide us with compensating restraints on aggression. Experience tells us that guns are more dangerous than knives, though both are efficient killing machines, because a gun is faster and provides us with less time to consider our act rationally – the only restraint left us.

Another problem is that we humans live not just in the "real" world, but in a symbolic world as well. A lion gets aggressive about something here-and-now. People get aggressive about things that happened long ago, things that they think will happen some day in the future, or things that they've been told is happening.

Likewise, a lion gets angry about pretty physical things. Calling him a name won't bother him a bit.

A lion gets angry about something that happens to him personally. We get angry about things that happen to our cars, our houses, our communities, our nations, our religious establishments, and so on. We have extended our "ego's" way beyond our selves and our loved ones to all sorts of symbolic things. The response to flag burning is only the latest example.

If aggression has an instinctual basis in human beings, we would expect there to be a sign stimulus. It would certainly not be something as simple as bright red males during mating season, as in stickleback fish. If we go back to the idea of competition as a fertile ground for aggression, we notice that frustration is a likely candidate. There are two of you who want the same thing; if one grabs it, the other doesn't get it and is unhappy; so he takes it, and now the other is unhappy; and so on. Goal-directed behavior has been blocked, and that is frustration.

Variations on that theme abound: We can be frustrated when an on-going behavior is interrupted (trying tripping someone); we can be frustrated by a delay of goal achievement (cut in front of someone on line at the supermarket); or we can be frustrated by the disruption of ordinary behavior patterns (cause me to forego my morning coffee). We are flexible creatures.

But we must beware here: Other things can lead to aggression besides frustration (or aren't highly paid boxers engaged in aggression?) and frustration can lead to other things besides aggression (or doesn't social impotence lead to depression?). Further, as Fromm points out, frustration (and aggression) is in the eyes of the beholder. He feels that the frustration must be experienced as unjust or as a sign of rejection for it to lead to aggression.


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# Social Learning


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## Learning

Whatever the possible instinctual component to human life, it is very clear that learning is the predominant component. And it isn't just that we do more learning than most animals; we even do it in more different ways!

The simplest kind of learning, which we share with all animals, we could call environmental: On the basis of your present understanding or knowledge, you anticipate certain things or act in a certain way – but the world doesn't meet with your expectations. So, after various other anticipations and actions, you adapt, develop a new understanding, gain new knowledge. This is often called conditioning or feedback.

For a social animal, much of this conditioning or feedback comes from others – i.e. it is social conditioning or feedback, rewards and punishments So, instead of learning not to run across streets by getting run-over, you learn by getting punished as you begin to run across the street. (This is even more effective if you get punished before you actually do anything, that is, as you are thinking about it. Some psychologists suggest that this is the source of conscience!) Or, instead of learning sex roles by accident, you are gently shaped by signs of social approval: "My, aren't you pretty!" or "Here's my little man!"

Another ability common to social animals is the ability to learn by observing others. There is, for example, vicarious learning: If you see a fellow creature get hurt or do well, get punished or rewarded, etc., for some action, you can "identify" with that fellow creature and learn from it.

Even more important is the ability called imitation (or modeling). We not only learn about the consequences of behaviors by watching others (as in vicarious learning), we learn the behaviors themselves as well!

For a linguistic social animal, social learning can be even further removed from immediate environmental feedback. We can, for example, learn by means of warnings, recommendations, threats, and promises. Even creatures without language can communicate these things (through growls and purrs and hisses and the like). But language turns it into a fine art.

And finally, we can learn from descriptions of behaviors, which we can "imitate" as if we had observed them. This is usually called symbolic learning. Further, we can learn whole complexes of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings such as beliefs, belief systems, attitudes, and values. It's curious how much we talk about conditioning and modeling in psychology, when we spend so much of our lives in school – that is, involved in symbolic learning!

## Culture

"Culture is a way of thinking, feeling, believing. It is the group's knowledge stored up (in memories..., books, and objects) for future use." (Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man*, p. 28.)

So culture is learned. But, as we saw, learning, at least in people, is a lot more than just conditioned responses. It would be more accurate to think of it as a soaking-up of the world – especially the social world – around you. This makes the impact of culture considerably richer, if not more fundamental, than the impact of genetics.

It is for this reason that many psychologists, sociologist, anthropologists, and others are so wary of the explanations – convincing as they sometimes are – of the sociobiologists: For every sociobiological explanation, we can find a cultural explanation as well. After all, culture operates by the same principles as evolution.

There are many different ways to do any one task, but in the context of a certain physical environment and a certain culture, some ways of doing things work better than others. These are more likely to be "passed on" from one generation to the next, this time by learning.


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Now, cultures need to accomplish certain things if they are to survive at all. They must assure effective use of natural resources, for example, which might involve the learning of all sorts of territorial and aggressive behaviors, just like in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a degree of cooperation, which might involve learning altruistic behaviors, rules for sharing resources and for other social relationships, just like the ones in sociobiological explanations. And they must assure a continuation of the population, which might involve certain courtship and marital arrangements, nurturant behaviors, and so on, just like in sociobiological explanations.

(Note that chastity is not sociobiologically fit. But if an organization has other recruitment techniques, it can survive, as have, for example, the the traditions of Catholic and Buddhist religious life.)

If a society is to survive – and any existing society has at least survived until now – it must take care of the very same issues that genetics must take care of. But, because learning is considerably more flexible than evolutionary adaptation, culture tends to replace genetics. That is, after all, only evolutionary good sense!

So do we have instincts? No – if instincts are defined as automatic relfex-like connections. But define instincts as "strong innate tendencies toward certain behaviors in certain situations" – yes, we do. The important point is that we (unlike animals) can always say no to our instinctual behaviors, just like we can say no to our learned ones!

## Learned Attraction

The strongest variable influencing attraction is, obviously, attractiveness – beauty, handsomeness, cuteness, and the like. If you want people to like you, be good-looking! (On blind-dates, what is the most important variable for a second date? You guessed it.)

What constitutes attractiveness may well have a genetic component to it, of course. But it is well worth noting that attractiveness can be very different in different cultures. In our culture, for example, thin is in. In the old Hawaiian culture, on the other hand, fat was where it was at. European culture, just a few hundred years ago, had a similar opinion: Look at Rembrandt's nudes! As long as your size allows you to survive and reproduce, nature allows culture to determine the variations.

Or look at how we decorate ourselves. In our culture, women paint their faces. In one tribe in Ethiopia, it’s the men who paint their faces. Men of the ancient Celts (ancestors of the Irish, among others) and American Indians not long ago painted their faces when going into battle. Maoris, the Ainu of Japan, the Native Americans of the Pacific northwest all thought facial tattoos were attractive, as do present day members of certain American subcultures. A few cultures use scarring to decorate their faces and bodies.

We wear earrings. Many women in India (and some here) also wear nose-rings. Some South American tribes stretched their earlobes. Some African tribes wore lip plugs. The Chinese of the last century thought deformed feet looked nice on rich ladies. We thought wasp waists and big bustles were sexy 100 years ago. Today, some people like piercing their navels, nipples, tongues, and even (ouch!) their genitalia.

How much we wear is another issue: We don't permit the display of a woman's breasts in public; other cultures permit that, but not the display of thighs; others don't permit display of the face; others still don't permit the display of a woman's hair. We don't permit public display of a man's penis; in the late middle ages, men wore "cod pieces," which contained and exaggerated the penis; in New Guinea, some tribes wear long cones over their penises. In ancient Greece, male athletes competed in the nude (that’s what gymnastics means – nude!) On and on.

And, what's more, attractiveness is in the eye of the individual beholder as well. Everyone, for example, believes their own baby is the most beautiful! In other words, learning accounts for at least a great deal of what we consider attractive.


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Whatever the roots of attractiveness, its effects are powerful. When it comes to attractive people, we tend to ignore their faults, forgive their trespasses, and even infer good qualities they don't necessarily have – better dispositions, motives, intelligence, etc.

An experiment by Snyder, Tanke, and Bersheid says a great deal about the effects of attractiveness: Men were asked to talk to a woman over the phone after being shown a picture of her. Half were shown an attractive picture of her; the other half were shown an unattractive picture of her. The ones that had seen the attractive photo thought she sounded more poised, humorous, and socially adept.

The conversations were bugged, and the independent listeners, who did not know which pictures the men had seen, rated the men who had seen the attractive photo as more poised, humorous, and socially adept.

And these independent listeners rated the woman talking to these men who had seen the attractive photo as being more poised, humorous, and socially adept – though, again, neither they nor the woman knew which photo the men had seen! In other words, if other people think you are good-looking, you will act appropriately and think of yourself as a good person: the old self-fulfilling prophecy. And if people consider you ugly, you may become crabby, which only confirms everyone's suspicions about ugly people.

## Conditioning

The simplest explanation for why we like some people more than others is conditioning: We like people who reward us, praise us, do us favors; we like people similar to ourselves (they validate us); we like cooperative people (for the mutual benefits). All this is quite compatible with the sociobiological point of view.

But you can see costs sneaking in: We don't always like it when people who reward us, do us favors, or praise us, if the rewards or favors or praises have strings attached. Their attempts at ingratiation cost us in terms of a restriction of freedom – the obligations they leave us with. Even if there was no intention to do so ("No, dear, this is for you! I really want you to have it!) we often feel this way.

Like anything, the meanings we give favors and praise depends on the context in which they are delivered. For example, how much you are attracted to someone who says nice things to you depends an awful lot on what you are used to. Elliot Aronson makes this a central idea in his gain-loss theory:

An increase in rewards from someone tends to lead to more liking than a steady, even if fairly high, level of rewards. And, likewise, a decrease in rewards leads to more dislike than a steady low level of rewards.

So a compliment from a stranger has considerably more potency than a compliment from your spouse, who has been giving you compliments for years. Or what hurts more, criticism from someone who criticizes you all the time, or criticism from your best friend? And who do we hate more, the office bastard or an ex-spouse? This little theory has been well supported by research.

Besides simple contrast, we can also see attribution at work here: If someone is always nice or always nasty, we make an internal attribution – that's their personality – and so the compliment, say, has little informational value. If someone changes, though, we make an external attribution: Let's see, why might they have complimented me? Perhaps because I actually deserved the compliment! I am the external cause.

Of course the external motive for someone being nice could also be an ulterior motive, i.e. ingratiation or "kissing up," which would diminish the effect!

Consider the difficulties this creates for long-term relationships such as marriage: If you are always nice, "the stranger" will appeal to your spouse; Yet if you try to be mean occasionally, you've only made yourself look even worse! You might want to try total honesty with your spouse instead of always being nice; That way, your positive comments will carry more weight, like the stranger's. But so will your negative comments, and in order to maintain your reputation of honesty, you must make a few! Your only hope is establishing your unconditional love for your partner.


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## Learned Aggression

Whatever the instinctual aspects of aggression, it is clear that learning is as significant here as it is with attraction.

One way to look at the effects of learning on aggression is to ask "whom, where, when, how, and how much?" Take your local grade school bully. He is rewarded for appropriate targets: boys, not girls (in my day, at least); of the "wrong" race, religion, or ethnic group; too fat, too skinny, wearing glasses, or a sissy; etc. He is rewarded for appropriate time and place: back alleys after school. He is rewarded for appropriate technique: punching, not slapping or kicking (again, in my day).

All this rewarding is, of course, backed up with punishment for inappropriate actions – the wrong person, time, place, and techniques.

The most important variable here, however, is how much. If one is repeatedly rewarded for aggression, and/or punished for non-aggression, one does more of it! As if you needed proof, here is one of a large number of studies that demonstrate this:

Some male college students were given lists of words to read. Some of these words were aggressive (punch), some were helpful (soothe), and some were neutral (globe). Some subjects were reinforced when they said aggressive words with nods, smiles, etc. Others were reinforced for helpful or neutral words. All were later given the opportunity to shock other people (for the usual made-up reasons). Guess who were the most vicious shockers?

The inverse works, too. Teachers were instructed to ignore aggressive behaviors in the playground while reinforcing cooperative ones with attention and praise. Playground aggression was dramatically reduced within two weeks.

Punishment of aggression is not recommended by most psychologists, whether they are behaviorists or humanists or whatever. We find that there are a number of counterproductive results:

Regarding whom: Displacement. You may redirect your anger to safe objects–dolls, pillows, your children, your spouse, minorities.... Instead of hitting your little brother, you kick your dog.

Regarding when and where: Suppression. Since punishment only suppresses aggressive behavior, rather than extinguishing it, it will be ready to "come out" when the punisher isn't around. You learn to kick your little brother under the table.

Regarding how: Indirect aggression. If you can't directly aggress against whomever you'd like to, you can do other things that partially satisfy: name calling, complaining, gossiping, and "gold-bricking" or passive-aggressive behavior. You can't hit your teacher – but you can talk behind her back, do a mean imitation of her, or make her life a living hell!

Regarding how much: Frustration. If you are prevented from engaging in the aggression you wish to engage in, you get angrier, and at more people. Punishing aggression seems to lead to more aggression in the long run!

The dilemma faced by parents of aggressive children remains, though. If you don't do something about Johnny hitting his little brother, Johnny may wind up a hit man for the mob, and his little brother a patient of the local shrink. The idea is to prevent aggressive behavior (for example, by removing Johnny from his little brothers abused presence) and reinforcing and modeling cooperative behavior. Life is not easy.

## Modeling

Perhaps the most important problem in the punishment of aggression is modeling (or imitation). Punishment, resembling aggression as it does, teaches that aggression is okay in certain circumstances: i.e. when you have power. "I'll teach you to hit someone smaller than you!" is followed by a lesson in following-through.


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The most famous experiment on the modeling of aggression is Albert Bandura's bobo-doll experiment. Bandura produced a short film in which a young woman assistant of his was shown beating up a bobo-doll (one of those inflatable clowns that pops back up when you punch him). She would punch him, shouting "sockeroo," kick him, shouting other obscenities, sit on him, hit him with a little plastic hammer, and so on. He then showed his film to kindergartners. As you might predict, they liked the film very much.

When the film was over, they were released into the play room, where, lo and behold, there was a brand new bobo-doll (and numerous little plastic hammers). Observers in the room recorded the kinds of behaviors the kids then engaged in. Of course, they punched the doll, shouting "sockeroo", they kicked it, they sat on it, they hit it with the little plastic hammers, and so on. Clearly, aggressive behavior can be learned by imitation.

Some critics (apparently ones without children of their own) suggested that, since bobo-dolls are meant to be hit, the experiment would never have worked with a living person. So Bandura made a new film, this time with the young lady abusing a live clown. When the children were finished with the movie and returned to the playroom, there was the live clown! Guess what?

Other variables Bandura looked at included (1) rewarding the woman for beating up the doll, (2) having a high status vs. low status model, (3) increasing the degree to which the kids identified with the model, and (4) portraying the aggression as somehow ethically justified. All these things lead to an increase in the amount of imitated aggression.

Notice that these variable are neatly combined in Johnny's favorite TV hero! Which brings us to a very important issue: What are the effects of TV violence on children?

Several studies "exposed" children to taped Saturday-morning cartoons, and then recorded their behavior in the playground. Compared with other kids who had not seen the cartoons, these kids were significantly more aggressive.

As if you didn't know, the same is true of college men. Expose them to boxing tapes, then introduce them into one of our "shocking" situations, and we found that they gave higher, longer, and more shocks than men who had seen peaceful films.

Overall, the research indicates that viewing aggression on TV leads to (1) highly specific imitation of even unusual aggressive behaviors, (2) a more general "reduction in restraint," and (3) desensitization, that is, a greater tolerance for aggression in others, on the tube, in society, etc.

And all this could last over long periods of time. A longitudinal study followed kids from the third grade to high school graduation. After extracting, statistically, all other factors (such as socioeconomic status, parents' education, and so on), it was found that the amount of aggressive cartoons watched in the third grade correlated with the amount of aggressive trouble they got into in high school – in boys.

But this was not so in girls. In looking for the reasons, they found that the correlation wasn't there either for boys who were raised in families that emphasized cooperation, i.e. alternatives to aggression. This parallels what we find in Japan and Hong Kong: The cartoons there can be extremely violent, even by our standards; yet the cultures are considerably less violent than our own. This is likely due to the emphasis on cooperation in those cultures.

One has to wonder, however, whether all this exposure to violence might not effect even those who learn cooperation. What if they find themselves in a situation where the cultural controls do not hold – war, for example, or other social disasters? And what about their tolerance for the aggressive behaviors of others? I'll be happier when we find other ways to entertain ourselves than watching people hurt each other.


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# Social Economics

Exchange Theory, Equity Theory, and Intrinsic Motivation


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## Exchange Theory

There is a side to life that involves a fairly cold, rational calculation of our gains and losses in social interaction: We weigh the alternatives, balance the anxiety and hopes, contemplate our moves, and so on. I call this the instrumental side of life, and it has been investigated in depth by researchers working under the name exchange theory.

The idea is a very old one, and the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham gave it the particularly expressive title "hedonistic calculus." In modern day theory, it is often expressed as a formula: MF = E x V. Motivational force is proportional to the expectancy times the value. If we are talking about a complex behavior, the motivational force will be equal to the average of the components' "E's x V's."

The expectancy is the subjective likelihood that the desired outcome will happen. This includes what you believe to be the relationship between your efforts and the results: "If I'm a good boy, I'll get a cookie;" "If I work hard, I'll be a success;" "If I yell at people, they'll work harder for me;" and so on. Mind you, these beliefs may be wrong and your probabilities way off, but as long as you hold them, they are a part of your motivational formula.

The value is the subjective desirability of the outcome – what the end is worth to you. Here we can draw on things like Maslow's hierarchy, or stick with the very idiosyncratic and sometimes weird values that make each one of us unique: "I want spiritual enlightenment;" "Money is number one for me;" "I really love Rocky Road."

Let me show you how you put them together. What is your motivational force for working hard in this class? Make a list of possible outcomes, the subjective odds (0 to 1.0) of reaching each outcome, and what each one is worth to you (-1.0 to 1.0). Then multiply each odds by each worth (E x V). Then add them up, making sure to keep track of the signs, and divide by the number of outcomes. You can then compare the motivational force of working hard in this class with other complex behaviors, such as spending the rest of this semester in the south of France.

Up to this point, we really have a theory of motivation. But we can make it a social theory easily enough, by looking at the "MF's" of two people whose outcomes depend on each other, i.e. by looking at an exchange.

### Games

Most of the research on exchange theory involves playing games. And the most common game used is based on the prisoners' dilemma. You and a fellow criminal are taken in by the cops on suspicion of armed robbery. The DA needs a confession from at least one of you in order to get an armed-robbery conviction. Otherwise he can only get the two of you for illegal possession of firearms. So he takes each of you into the interrogation room one-at-a-time, and makes an offer:

If neither of you confess, he'll get both of you for illegal possession of firearms, carrying a mandatory minimum sentence of one year apiece.

If one of you confesses, that one will be released for turning state's evidence, and the other will have the book thrown at him – ten years.

If both of you confess, however, he'll be forced to go ahead and prosecute you both, but he'll push for light sentences of five years apiece.

You can arrange this in the form of a matrix:


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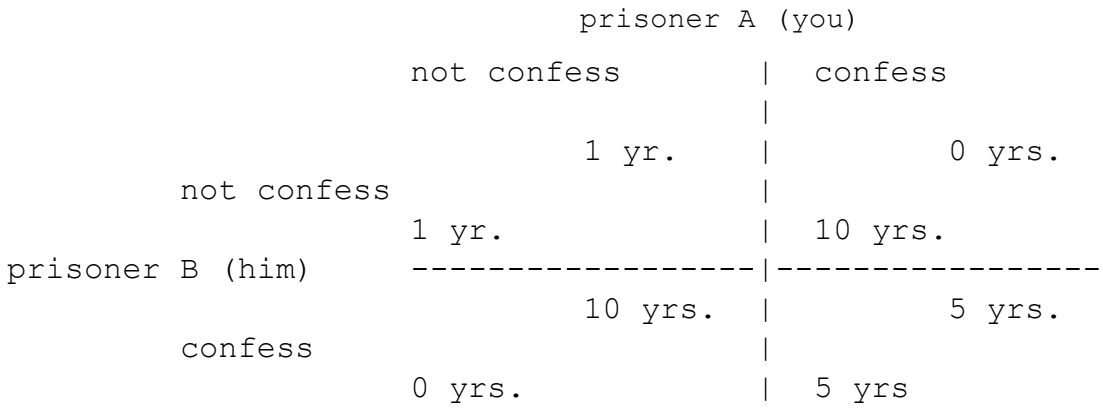
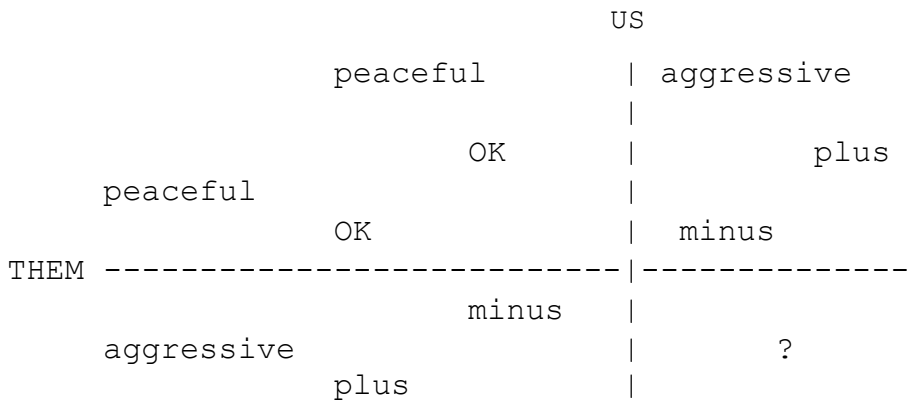


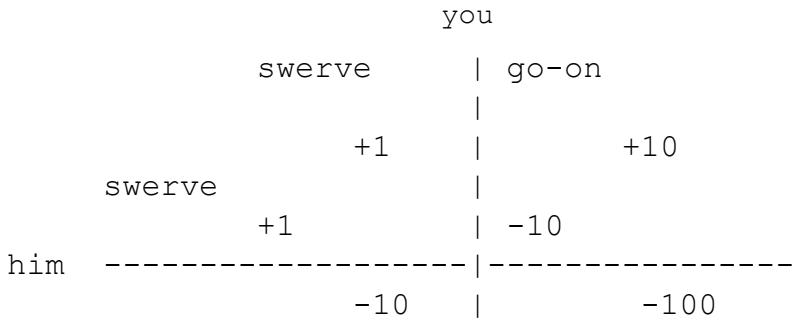

The cooperative choice here is to not confess: You are cooperating with each other (not with the DA), aiming at the best overall results for both of you. The competitive choice is to confess: You are trying to get the best result for yourself, regardless of your colleague-in-crime.

So this is called a mixed-motive game, because you can be altruistic or aggressive. Most games that we find interesting – from football to tennis to chess to bridge – are competitive only. You cooperate with your teammates, of course, but the scores in a competitive game are "zero-sum:" If I win, you lose; if you win, I lose.

Mixed-motive games, though, are a better model of reality than purely competitive games, and the pattern of the prisoners' dilemma can be found everywhere. Take international relations, for example:




Or take the old street game called chicken, where two young gentlemen drive their hot rods straight at each other. The first one to swerve off the road loses his reputation and his pink slip (car registration).





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```
go-on                |
        +10          | -100
```

These, of course, are highly subjective: If you both swerve, you get 1 point of relief each. If one swerves and the other doesn't, the first loses and the other gains ten "machismo" points, exchangeable locally for the respect and affection of guys and gals alike. But if both go on, it'll cost each 100 points of pain and suffering.

(Notice that in these games, the "scores" are more negative than positive. This suggests that these are games you shouldn't play at all! But there are other games that are much more positive.)

The question comes up: How do you decide? In the case of the original prisoners' dilemma, it's a one time deal with the DA, so you have only your opinion of your colleague's character. But in chicken, and in most real life versions, you can play again and again, so your decision can be based on your experience with or knowledge of your opponent. And you can use the exchange formula:

If your opponent tends to swerve 50 percent of the time, and go on 50 percent of the time, what is the relative MF of your possible moves? The MF for you swerving is 50% times +1 (the relief you'll feel if both of you swerve) plus 50% times -10 (your chicken points), which comes to a - 4 1/2.

(50% x +1) + (50% x -10) = - 4 1/2

The MF for going on is 50% times +10 (your macho points) plus 50% times -100 (your pain and suffering points), which comes to -45.

(50% x +10) + (50% x -100) = -45

Either choice is negative (so you would have been better off not playing at all), but swerving is definitely your better bet.

If, on the other hand, your opponent swerves 99 out of 100 times, the figures look like this:

(99% x +1) + (1% x -10) = +.89

(99% x +10) + (1% x -100) = +8.9

This time, it is worth your while to be macho.

Of course, he's figuring the odds as well, based on your past performance, which changes the odds you'll need to figure your choice, which changes the odds for him.... This is what makes poker – otherwise a childish game of chance – such an interesting game.

Theoretically, you can use these matrices to model any social interaction. Say your boss is heading down the hall towards you. You've been thinking of asking her for a raise. In fact, you've just clinched a major deal for her. As you pass in the hall, you have a number of options: You could say hello; You could ask for advice (you know: make her feel smart); You could introduce the idea of a raise, etc. Your boss also has a number of options: She could say hello; She could compliment you on the deal; She could ignore you entirely, etc. Each combination of responses has certain costs and benefits to each of you, and you both may in fact be calculating the MF's for each possible action.

## Strategies

People like to simplify their lives as much as possible. So many of us, rather than figuring MF's all the time, choose to live by certain principles. One possibility is to always turn the other cheek, i.e. to consistently play cooperatively. If the other people in your life are playing rationally (rather than by your high principles), they will choose the competitive choice every time, and you will lose and lose big. On the other hand, if you decide to live your life aggressively, anyone who begins with an effort at cooperation will soon learn his lesson and begin to respond with competitive choices, and you will both lose big. Is there some consistent strategy that works a little better?


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The best strategy is very simple and works by encouraging both your partner and you to be cooperative. It's called the contingency strategy: You start by cooperating; from then on, you do whatever your opponent did in the previous turn. Tit for tat.

Some social psychologists actually suggested we start doing this with the Soviet Union in regards to nuclear armament. They called it GRIT, for graduated reduction in tension. We never adopted it, but it's the strategy Gorbachev used.

This game model of human interaction becomes much more interesting when you start adding players. What we see then are the formations of coalitions – weaker players ganging up on stronger ones. This is essentially what republics and democracies are all about!

## Economic Problems

Unfortunately for those of us who would like neat formulas, the exchange formulas are loaded with problems.

First, there are problems with the formula as a whole. For example, people don't always "optimize" – they more often "satisfice." That is, they have a minimum acceptable level of outcome. We don't wait for perfection, but grab the first thing that is "good enough." Also, people often function in terms of "short-run" results, without considering the "long-run." We may take a 10% variable mortgage over a 12% fixed, for example. And people try to make things more certain, whether that is to their advantage or not. Most people would rather have $80 guaranteed than a 90% chance at $100, even though the latter has a higher "motivational force." To summarize, we prefer satisfactory short-run certainties to optimal long-run risks. This is why most of us do so poorly in the stock market.

Another major difficulty in using the exchange formulas for predicting behavior is that the expectancies and values are all subjective. For example, they depend a great deal on your personality: Some people are very optimistic and feel in control of their lives ("internal locus of control," we say); others are more pessimistic and feel as if they were the victims of their environment, society, genetics, or whatever ("external locus of control").

Further, we can distort expectancies like gang-busters, thereby wreaking havoc on the probabilities. You're doing badly in a "cake" class–so you convince yourself that the material is too stupid to take seriously. Or you stop studying, so that when you fail it's because you didn't study– not because you have the IQ of a stalk of celery. Or you redefine your purpose in attending classes: It used to be "to learn;" Now it's "to make the grade." This makes it possible to take advantage of special educational techniques such as cheating. This last example actually involves changing values in order to deal with a problem in expectancies! You can see, I suspect, that expectancies are a bit more slippery than the nice neat letter E would lead you to expect.

Then there are difficulties with values as well. What you value depends on your needs, obviously. If you need protein, eating has a high motivational force behind it. But values also depend on internal comparisons, what you are used to getting, both in terms of quality and quantity. Although we may need protein, that nutritious bowl of gruel may nevertheless be little valued.

It also depends on external comparisons, what you see others getting. Although that Big Mac may satisfy the need for protein, if everyone around you is sucking up lobster....

Basically, external comparisons have to do with fairness: If I see you getting more than me, I may consider that unfair. This is just one more extension of our desire for an orderly world, a just world. Some theorists even suggest that we had to invent an afterlife precisely for this reason: The good weren't getting sufficiently rewarded, and the evil sufficiently punished, in this life!


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## Equity theory

This business of fairness is so evident, there is a whole minitheory that addresses it called equity theory. It is basically a more sophisticated version of comparison, combined with the idea of dissonance: We look at the ratio of our outcomes to inputs and compare with others' ratio of outcomes to inputs. If I work as hard as he does, I expect the same pay; if he gets the same pay, I expect him to work as hard as I do.

$$\frac{\text{my O}}{\text{my I}} \;=?\; \frac{\text{his O}}{\text{his I}}$$

If your ratio is better than mine, I will feel dissonance in the form of anger; if mine is better than yours, I will feel guilt. (Many of you may note that we don't feel quite as guilty when we are doing well than we feel angry when we're not. No problem for the theory: The pain of guilt is eased a bit by the fact that we are, in fact, being rewarded by doing well!)

Again, the numbers in the formula are quite subjective, and what is an outcome (or input) to me may not be one to you.

Outcomes, using jobs as an example, might include pay, insurance, other benefits, status, good hours and vacations, nice office, responsibility, no responsibility....

Inputs might include time, effort, sweat, mental sweat, seniority, education required, experience required, amount of brown-nosing required, need to dress-up....

So what is relevant to you goes into your formula, and what is relevant to me goes into mine: Who should get the promotion first – the old timer or the young turk? It depends on who does the figuring.

Of course dissonance often results in dissonance-fixing. If we have a certain degree of maturity, of course, we could take actions that really change things for the better. We are, however, as likely to do defensive things:

1. We can change our own inputs. If we are angry, for example, we can do less work, take off more often, even sabotage our work.
2. We can change our outcomes. We can pad our expense accounts, pilfer supplies, play with the books....
3. We can cause the others with whom we compare ourselves to change their inputs or outcomes. We can badger them to work harder, point out their faults to superiors, and generally make their lives a living hell.
4. We can do any of these things "in our minds" – i.e. engage in distortion or denial. "It's lousy pay, but hey! At least I have a great view from my office. And at least I have a job. And I don't really value success the way some people do."
5. And we can remove ourselves, leave, quit!

The research has been pretty supportive of the theory. Even regarding the "guilt" aspect: People thought they were working on an assembly line with another person. They were told that they did 35% of the work and the other person did 65% of the work. Then they were asked to divide the reward in any way they thought right. Lo and behold, most people gave themselves about 35% of the reward! In other studies, when they were convinced that they were being over-paid, they tried to work harder!

But, in equity theory, we can see some the the same problems as with exchange theory in general, and a few problems even more clearly. The equity formula says, in essence, "to each according to his inputs." If we are distributing the luxuries of life, few of us would disagree with the formula: If you don't work, you don't play.


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But what about votes? Should they only go to those who make an active contribution to society? To the employed, for example? Or to land-owners (as some of our founding fathers would have preferred)? Or to people with titles? Hardly. The rule most of us prefer here is "to each, one" or "to each equally."

And what about medicine? And basic food? Should the poor do without? They do, often enough, even in our society. Most of us would agree, though, that when it comes to the necessities, the rule should read "to each according to his needs." (Thanks, Karl Marx.)

By altering the formula to fit these different cases, we might be able to salvage equity theory.

## Intrinsically valued acts

Despite the problems we've talked about so far, the exchange model remains a useful one when the behaviors we are looking at are instrumental, that is, means to ends. These ends are called goals, purposes, values, or sometimes meanings (because without them, the behaviors have no meaning!).

So what about behaviors that are not means to ends? Acts that are intrinsically meaningful, intrinsically valued? Obviously, you can't use the formulas for these things.

An example is bravery: If you rush into a burning building to save a baby – that's brave! But if you did so because someone promised you a million dollars as a reward – that's just greedy. It's only bravery if you don't do it as a means to an end.

Or take generosity: If you give unselfishly, you are generous. If you give in order to ingratiate yourself to someone, or to get something from someone – that's just manipulation. It's only generosity if you have no ulterior motives.

Honesty: Is it still honesty if it serves your purpose?

Love: Is it still love if you have conditions on it?

Let's look a little more closely at bravery. It's not bravery if you act because of a reward. Neither is it bravery if you act in order to win approval or to go to heaven. Neither is it bravery if you aren't aware of the danger, or if you're hypnotized or drugged.... You must choose to do it knowing the risks. A brave person is one who does it because he feels it is the right thing to do. He may come by this feeling through intuition, or social learning, or moral reasoning, but as long as he sees it as the right thing to do, and nothing more, it's bravery.

Another way to look at it is that a person behaves bravely because it is a part of who he is. It is a part of his integrity. He wouldn't feel right if he didn't. He couldn't live with himself. But don't get confused: You still don't "act" brave in order to feel good about yourself. Bravery is a way of feeling good!

Bravery, for most of us, is a once-in-a-great-while kind of thing. Let's look at something that occupies much more of our lives: Work. Most people spend a third of their lives working or preparing to work (i.e. school). It is taken for granted that we work instrumentally, that is, for money, which in turn will provide us with the necessities of life and, we hope, a few of the luxuries as well. To this extent, we can look at work through the exchange model.

But some work and aspects of work are also intrinsically valuable: Skill, quality, craftsmanship, invention, discovery, creativity, dedication, duty, service.... These satisfy our sense of self, enhance our lives, enhance other's lives, and generally improve the world. In other words, work can be a form of actualization, a value in itself, something which gives life meaning.


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# Persuasion


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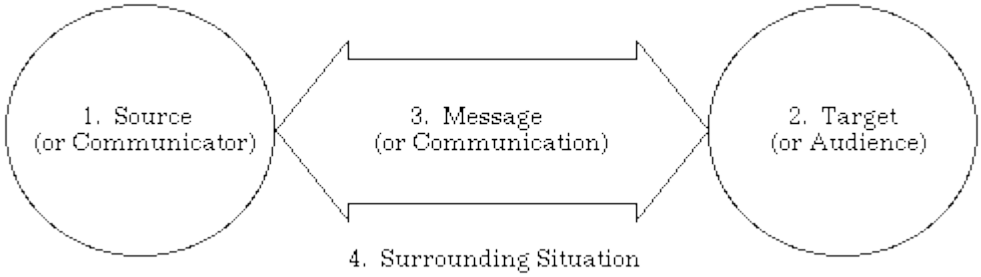
Influence is the art and science of changing people. If you recall our discussion of the roots of status, two types of influence were mentioned–a "natural" one involving respect and an "instrumental" one involving power. Power does sound rather physical; but instrumental influence can be considerably more subtle, and includes persuasion.

The traditional graphic representation of persuasion is this:




Let's take it one part at a time.

## Source

The effectiveness of the source as a persuader is usually called credibility, or believability. It has been found to be based on a number of factors, including expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Expertness. If we perceive someone to be an expert in a particular area of concern, we will tend to find him more credible. So we find commercials for aspirin presented by doctors, or people pretending to be doctors, coffee presented by restauranteurs, or people pretending to be restauranteurs, and so on.

Trustworthiness. If we perceive someone as being honest, we will be more likely to believe him. Several things can influence that perception. For example, if we detect signs that there are ulterior motives, if it seems that the source has something to gain by convincing us, we lose our trust in them.

If the source does not appear to be intentionally influencing us, we trust him more. If I overhear people saying how wonderful I am, I will believe it more than if someone tells me to my face–the latter person may be buttering me up.

If the source's position is actually counter to his self-interest, we trust him more. One experiment had a supposed criminal arguing for or against stiffer jail sentences, and a prosecutor doing the same. People tended to believe the prosecutor more when he argued against stiffer jail sentences, and the criminal more when he argued for stiffer jail sentences.

Of course, generally speaking we trust prosecutors more than criminals. We often attribute an overall tendency to honesty to entire groups of people in a stereotypical fashion. One study asked college students to rate the trustworthiness of a variety of occupations from 1 (complete trust) to 4 (no trust at all), with the following results: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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dentist | 1.43 | Lawyers | 2.06 |
| Clergymen | 1.44 | TV Repairmen | 2.12 |
| Physicians | 1.55 | Police Officers | 2.24 |
| Psychologists | 1.56 | Columnists | 2.29 |
| Psychiatrists | 1.58 | Car Mechanics | 2.37 |
| Judges | 1.60 | Army Generals | 2.60 |
| Professors | 1.67 | Union Officials | 2.63 |
| H.S. Teachers | 1.84 | Executives | 2.68 |
| Plumbers | 1.96 | Politicians | 3.18 |
| TV Reporters | 2.06 | Used Car Salesmen | 3.29 |

It is a point of curiosity that the bottom half of the trust scale goes to big military, big labor, big business, big government, and a stereotype!

Liking. Attractiveness, as you could guess by now, can override almost any other variable, including expertness and trustworthiness. First, if the source is physically attractive, he will be more persuasive. In experiments, an attractive student could lead to considerably more attitude change in an audience than an ugly professor. Fortunately for ugly professors, given time and better arguments, the professor will eventually win out. Eventually.

If the source is similar to you, you will like him more and believe him more. If someone is seen as sharing our national, economic, racial, or religious background, or is the same age or sex, or appears in any way to share our values or perspectives, their arguments will tend to be taken as our arguments. It is not for nothing that politicians say things like "my fellow Americans..." or "friends, Romans, countrymen...." It works as well if the source is a part of our reference group, that is, is what we would like to be....

You may have noticed that expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness were mentioned under the respect form of influence when it was discussed under status, yet I said a few paragraphs back that we were going to talk about instrumental influence. Well, if a person uses our respect for him to influence us, it isn't "natural" anymore, is it? And if a person pretends to be an expert, or trustworthy, or your best buddy...? Most examples we have of persuasion do indeed seem to be instrumental, that is, involving the use of power. Later, we will see some examples of natural influence.

## Target

The target's susceptibility to persuasion has also been associated with a variety of variables, in particular commitment to his present beliefs, self-esteem, and prior experience with the argument.

Commitment. How important is it for the target to hold on to his present beliefs, and so to resist the communication? This depends, first, on his investment in those beliefs, how much money, time, energy, or ego he has put into them. If you just bought a certain brand of car, you will be less susceptible to my arguments for buying another brand. Cognitive dissonance plays a part here, no doubt.

More subtly, and more importantly, the embeddedness of the target's beliefs makes them more resistant to change. If the particular belief that a persuasion attempt is focused on changing is embedded in a whole system of beliefs, in a world-view, a philosophy, then changing that belief would have to involve changing the whole system. A clear example of embeddedness is to be found in the abortion issue: For the "pro-choice" person, abortion is embedded in issues of individual freedom; for the "pro-life" person, it is tied up with the sanctity of life.

Self-esteem. If you don't respect yourself, why should you argue with anyone else? You might see self-


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esteem as involving the target's sense of his own expertness, his liking of himself, his trust in himself. But note that self-esteem can change with a change in the communication topic (as well as with situations and even sources): Even the "weakest" of us have our strengths.

Prior experience. If you have never had to defend a particular belief before, you may have a hard time doing it. People coming from "left field" often have success based simply on the target's lack of experience. What's so bad about brother-sister incest, assuming they are both consenting? Why should we allow the unemployed to vote? And the question that can really throw the novice at the all-night crisis hot-line: Why is it better to be alive than dead?

If we give the target a little support –a few good arguments to use in his defense–he may fare better. Or if we give him a small chance to come up with his own defense.... This is called inoculation, resembling as it does inoculating someone against some dreaded disease by giving them a small dose of the disease.

During the 1940's and 50's, many parents and teachers sought to protect children from the evils of Marxism by simply not talking about it. During the 60's and 70's, those protected children first heard the persuasive arguments of Karl Marx in college – and many were persuaded. Most later understood the limitations of Marx's vision. They would have been considerably more resistant to persuasion had they had some familiarity with Marxism, and not in negative terms only – in positive terms as well. Similarly, today we try to steer children away from drugs with scare campaigns. Perhaps kids should be told the positive side of drugs, that is, why people take them. Then they might not be so surprised by their persuasiveness.

## The Message

People often want to know the tricks to persuasion. For example, they will want to know whether, in a debate, it is better to go first or second. The answer, unfortunately, is "it depends:" If A speaks today, and B speaks tomorrow, with the vote to be taken right afterwards, then it is better to be B. B's speech will be recalled better by the voters, because of the recency effect. On the other hand, if A speaks and B speaks right afterwards, and the vote is taken the following day, it is better to be A. A's speech will interfere with learning B's, and so be more influential the next day – the primacy effect.

Another question is whether it is better to give a one-sided argument or to include your opponent's argument within your own. Do I bring up his point-of-view, or don't I even mention his name? Again, it depends: If the audience is intelligent, give both sides (pushing your own, of course), because intelligent people will do it for you if you don't, and then you won't be in control. If the audience is unintelligent, give only your own point-of-view. If the initial position of the audience is against you, give both sides, for the same reasons you would do so with intelligent audiences. If they are already for you, give them your side only (as is done in political conventions, for example).

But these issues disappear in significance when compared with how one constructs one's communication. The source may just make a proclamation: "Up the revolution!" It may seem silly, but when you analyze many an advertisement or political speech, there is little more than that there. Or the source may deliver a tightly-reasoned argument, logically sound and well demonstrated: A rational argument. Maybe I'm being cynical, but I don't think this happens very often (even in college classes). Most likely, the source will use (consciously or unconsciously) every trick in the book. These tricks, illogic posing as logic, are known as fallacies.

The target may fight back. He may resort to the blanket rejection: "Nope." Or he may rebut every point the source makes with razor-sharp logic and elegant demonstrations. Or he, too, may distort the message and derogate the source using those very same fallacies. Why do we use fallacies? Because they work. They, like stereotypes, are our convenient, practical, short-cut ways of dealing with the world. And yet, like stereotypes, they can be so terribly wrong.


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What follows is a list of informal fallacies, adapted from S. Morris Engel's With Good Reason. First, the fallacies of presumption:

**1. Sweeping generalization.** This is where we try to apply a general rule to special cases: "That is the richest sorority on campus. Therefore, Susan, who is a member of it, must be one of the richest young women on campus." Must she?

**2. Hasty generalization.** Here, a special case is used as the basis of a general rule: "I know a union representative and he's a terrible person. I wouldn't trust any of them." Why not?

**3. Bifurcation** ("black or white"). Here, we presume an either-or distinction: "We must choose between safety and freedom. And it is in the nature of good Americans to take the risk of freedom." Must we choose? Can't we have both?

**4. Begging the question** (vicious cycle, circular argument). Instead of offering real proof, we can just restate the conclusion we are supposed to come to, and hope the listener doesn't notice: "Government ownership of public utilities is dangerous, because it is socialistic." Government ownership of public utilities is socialism. You've just been told that it's dangerous because it is what it is.

**5. Question-begging epithets** (mudslinging, name calling, loaded words, emotive language, etc.). Restating the conclusion in "hot" language: "This criminal is charged with the most vicious crime known to man." Does it prove something, or just get the blood flowing?

**6. Complex question** (loaded question, trick question, leading question, etc.). Ask a question that leads others to believe that a previous question has been answered in a certain way: "Answer yes or no: Did you ever give up your evil ways?" If you say yes, that tells us you had evil ways; if you say no, that tells us you still have them. What if you never had them?

**7. Special pleading.** Here, we use a double-standard of words: "The ruthless tactics of the enemy, his fanatical, suicidal attacks have been foiled by the stern measures of our commanders and the devoted self-sacrifice of our troops." Are ruthless tactics different from stern measures? Fanatical, suicidal attacks from devoted self-sacrifice?

**8. False analogy.** An analogy or metaphor illustrates or elaborates; it doesn't prove anything: "The American Indian had to make way for Western civilization; after all, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs." Are the lives and cultures of millions comparable to eggs? What does making omelettes have to do with history and morality?

**9. False cause** (post hoc ergo propter hoc). Here, we assume causal connections that haven't been demonstrated. The Latin phrase means "after this, therefore because of this." "You should go to Harvard, because Harvard graduates make more money." Or could it be that they had more money before they went?

**10. Irrelevant thesis** (irrelevant conclusion, ignoring the issue, befogging the issue, diversion, red herring, etc.). Demonstrating a point other than the one at issue. Escaped convicts in Elizabethan England would smear themselves with rotten (red) herring to throw the dogs off the scent. "I fail to see why hunting should be considered cruel when it gives tremendous pleasure to many people and employment to even more." So we should stop talking about cruelty and start talking about pleasure and employment?

The next set of fallacies are called fallacies of relevance:

**11. Personal attack** (including the abusive form, circumstantial form, poisoning the well, and tu quoque). In personal attack, we ask the listener not to consider the argument, but to consider where it is coming from: "This theory about a new cure for cancer has been introduced by a man known for his Marxist sympathies. I don't see why we should extend him the courtesy of our attention." Tu quoque (Latin for "look who's talking!") is especially popular: "If you think communal living is such a great idea, why aren't you living in a commune?" This fallacy is often presented to parents encouraging their children not to make the same mistakes they made.

**12. Mob appeal** (appeal to the masses). This involves theatrical appeals to our lowest instincts, such as


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selfishness, greed, jealousy, or vanity. "Because you are a college audience, I know I can speak to you about difficult matters seriously." Oh, well, thank you very much; please go on!

**13. Appeal to pity.** This is an appeal to your tender emotions, your sympathy: Listen, if you can bear it, to any telethon. Or listen to advertisements that try to sell computers to parents: "You wouldn't want your kids to be left behind on the information super-highway, would you? What kind of parent are you anyway?"

**14. Appeal to authority.** This is where we bring up famous people, reference groups, science, tradition, religion, universality.... "Camel filters. They're not for everybody." "Meow mix. Cats ask for it by name." "Sony. Ask anyone." This includes the famous technique called snob appeal.

**15. Appeal to ignorance.** My position is right because there is no evidence against it: "There is intelligent life in outer space, for no one has been able to prove that there isn't." Fact of the matter is, you can't prove the non-existence of something: No matter how hard you look, I can always say you haven't looked hard enough. Go ahead: Prove to me that unicorns don't exist.

**16. Appeal to fear.** Don't argue with me, it's dangerous: "If you do not convict this murderer, one of you may be his next victim." This one is frequently used in deodorant ads.

This last fallacy has some research to go with it. What is more effective in changing attitudes – great fear? A little fear? No fear? For example, if we want to convince people to wear seat-belts, do we give them gentle warnings and "buckle-up for safety" jingles? Or do we show them pictures of battered cars? Or of mangled bodies? It seems to be another of those "it depends" questions: Generally, fear works when used on people with healthy egos. But people who are less than secure about themselves – neurotics, juvenile delinquents, children – tend to "block out" the information, rather than be influenced. Fear works, in other words, on the people who least need to be convinced of reasonable ideas.

## Advertising

In all the preceding, even "mob appeal" and "personal attack" and the like, the fallacy is quite explicit – right there, out in the open for anyone with a little sense to see. But we can be much more subtle in our persuasion – as we in fact are in advertising. Advertising seems so innocuous, but note that you are being persuaded without becoming suspicious, without even being fully aware of it! That's scary!

The major technique is called image – the creation of associations: Basically, if you can get the target to associate your product or candidate, or message, with "good," you've done your job – without actually using any arguments, fallacious or rational, at all!

United Airlines used to ask us to "fly the friendly skies of United." The message is "fly United;" the association is " friendly United." Or the famous Marlboro man advertisements, with their rugged men, their nature, all that health and beauty.... There's no indication of full ashtrays, smoky rooms, hacking coughs, butts by the lakeshore.... The success of that ad campaign is measured by the fact that Marlboros used to be a women's cigarette!

One common association is to success: Use our product, and you too will be successful. But the most common of all is sexuality: Use our product and, well, you know.... Beer commercials, as we all know, are notorious for their use of beach scenes, which allow for great amounts of exposed skin. Perhaps it hasn't occurred to you, but do beer drinkers tend to look like these people? There never seems to be a beer belly among them! Also keep your eyes out for some of the cute techniques advertisers use to enhance the sexual nature of beach scenes: Look out for people stripping down to their bathing suits (often in colors close to their skin colors); look for people (especially women) in awkward positions; look for camera angles that emphasize and linger on one portion of the anatomy or another....

Magazine advertisements allow even more sexual emphasis. Note some ads for perfume involving a naked


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woman nearly smothered in beautiful male bodies, or a woman getting amorous towards renaissance statues. There was a Harvey's Bristol Cream ad that consisted of two people, male and female, very healthy, sadly prevented from skiing by a snow storm raging outside their private cabin. They drown their sadness in Harvey's, lounging on a couch, under a blanket, in front of the fire, clearly in the buff. I ran right out and bought a bottle.

Even more basic than image is the appeal to attention, the recognition factor: If we get people to look our way, we have more than half the battle won. So, we have bright colors, simple logos, catchy jingles, impressive packaging, and constant repetition. You'll find this in politics as well as in advertising.

You see, when confronted with a choice, we tend to go with the familiar (brand names, Q-ratings, "high visibility," etc.) even if that familiarity is based on nothing more than how "noisy" you are – i.e. how well you have gotten people's attention! The squeaky wheel and all that, you know. Even the obnoxiousness of "ring-around-the-collar" type ads can work.

Keep your eyes open for the effect of context: If everyone has red, white, and blue packaging, then yellow and green stand out, even though they are less well liked. If everyone is using futuristic logos, try an old-fashioned package theme. If everyone is blaring rock and roll jingles, try some Vivaldi, or dead silence (remember the Infiniti ads?).

Another scary idea is created needs: Advertising can make you "need" what you had never even considered. The fashion industry is notorious for this. By raising a hemline, they make the consumer feel like they are out of style and therefore in need of the new, higher hemline line. People didn't used to worry much about perspiration stains – why hide good honest sweat? Our ancestors didn't even worry much about the smell of good honest sweat. But by showing people embarrassed by "wet spots," we begin to assume that others (to whose minds we have so little access) really do care about these things. So we smear aluminum waste products into our pores.

(Notice that they are using appeals to fear and associating non-use of their products with negative images! The web gets increasingly tangled.)

The same thing applies to spots on glasses, grittiness in the bathtub, feminine freshness, and graphic equalizers. We seldom ask ourselves whether we truly need or want these things. Why must our shirts fluoresce in the sun? Why should we bother to iron our clothes? Who needs a lawn all perfectly manicured – I personally have a thing for meadow wildflowers. Why do we need powerful engines in cars when we aren't allowed to go 100 anyway? What's wrong with the grit in the bathtub – it used to mean we had cleaned it well! Why shouldn't we smell like people, instead of like hospitals, petunias, or animal glands?

So they've caught your attention, given you the proper associations, and made you want it whether you need it or not. From then on, they can let our natural conservatism do some of the work: brand loyalty. We tend to buy and use what we're used to. Think in terms of cognitive dissonance theory: I use it – it must be good!

## Situational Factors

With our discussion of image in advertising, we are quite close to talking about "situational factors:" The associations in advertising are still contained within the message or communication, but it's a small step to associating the message with "good things" presented more immediately. The three-martini lunch at a fine restaurant has helped many a salesperson get their message across. This is just reinforcement.

There are other techniques: Distraction can help a source make his point. Try making your plea while chauffeuring your target at high speeds on mountain roads. Or while their attention is caught up in an attractive other. Anything that makes your listener tense, nervous, excited, curious, and so on, will take his or her mind off logical rebuttal of your argument.


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And appropriateness, though seldom thought of, can be quite powerful: If you try to sell insurance at a funeral, people will kick you out on your rear. I call this the "Vanessa Redgrave" syndrome (She made a political speech once instead of an acceptance speech on an awards show, and so outraged everyone that her message was totally lost).

Or we can do a great deal more with the situation. The most dramatic example is brainwashing. Now understand that brainwashing is not a terribly common form of persuasion (although any brainwashing is too much). Even some otherwise highly offensive techniques such as interrogation and indoctrination fall short of being full examples. But spending some time on brainwashing is well worth it: Bits and pieces of it can be found everywhere you look.

## Brainwashing

The first step is the assault on identity, better known as "breaking" a person or "softening them up." There are a variety of techniques:

1. Physical fatigue. Keep the person awake for long periods of time – it is a very powerful technique, used in p.o.w. camps and cult indoctrinations alike. Keep them hot, uncomfortable, cramped, overexerted, etc. as well.

2. Uncertain environment. Keep them confused. Never let them know what's going on. Don't give them windows, clocks, calendars. Don't let them know when (or if) their next meal will come, or their next opportunity for rest or sleep. The Iranian students that held the American hostages even had them come out before firing squads, only to hear, on the shout of "fire," the click of empty rifles.

3. Stripped self-image. Allow them only uniform, humiliating clothing (such as the stripped pajamas of old-time prisons – and hospital gowns!), or no clothing at all. Shave their heads (we use hair to give ourselves identity and esteem – hence the shaving of French prostitutes who slept with Nazis). Give them a number, or someone else's name, or some nasty epithet.

4. Self-betrayal. Lead the prisoner to "sell-out" friends, relatives, fellow prisoners.... Guilt is like a nose ring – you can lead someone anywhere with it, once it is established.

For example, Dr. Vincent, a European physician in Shanghai, was arrested one day by five armed men and taken to a "reeducation center" (i.e. prison), where he was to spend the next three and a half years. (See J.C.C. Brown's book for a complete description)

First, he was taken to an 8 by 12 cell shared with eight other prisoners. These were "more advanced" in their reform, and were eager to "help" Vincent. Surrounded by the others, he was "grilled" – told that he must confess, that the government doesn't arrest innocent people, and so on. This lasted ten hours. It's called "the struggles."

He was then taken to an interrogation room – a small room with a bare bulb, a hard chair, an interrogator, translator, and secretary. He was told that he had committed crimes against the people, that they knew all about them, and that it was time to confess. He endured ten hours of questioning.

He was handcuffed and chained and sent back to his cell for more struggles. He was permitted no sleep, forced to eat on his hands and knees, and had to be assisted in urinating. In other words, he was stripped of all dignity.

In the second interrogation, he made up a confession. It was, of course, rejected. It would have been rejected even if it were true – they don't need a confession! Then they sent him back to his cell for more struggles.

In his third interrogation, he recounted every detail of his life he could recall. They would then have him dictate what he had said in the interrogation to one of his fellow prisoners back in the cell.

In all, he spent eight days and nights going through this cycle, without sleep.

During the next month or so, a confession was pieced together. During this time, he winds up "betraying"


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fellow prisoners, friends, relatives – so now he feels guilty, and it's only a matter of directing that guilt.

The next "step" is called leniency and opportunity – i.e. reinforcement. Things got better as he cooperated, worse when he did not. Prisoners often come to love their interrogators, since he is normally the one that says when the chains come off, when his food gets better, gives him a cigarette, etc.

And the next "step" is reeducation: within the cell group, a cell "chief" reads from newspapers or books and each member has to discuss the articles and criticize each other. This is called "learning to express oneself from the people's standpoint."

When your views are deemed "erroneous," you are asked to "look inside yourself for the roots of your reactionary tendencies." In other words, you not only learn to argue with other prisoners, you learn to argue with yourself. No force is involved at this point. Everything is done with discussion. It isn't too far from some less savory forms of group therapy!

One year of this, then interrogations again, leading to a "refined" confession. Fourteen more months, then another revision. Finally, he signed a final confession before cameras.

Afterwards, he was expelled from China. At first, he missed prison very much and feared capitalists. But eventually he recovered. Most people, given the opportunity, do recover. But note that most victims of brainwashing are not given that opportunity. They remain in their own country, where their brainwashing is supported by the people around them. They do not recover.

## Another Way

There is definitely something negative about all this persuasion stuff – obviously with brainwashing, but only a little less obviously with advertising. It is all so manipulative. It is, in fact, very instrumental, that is, means-to-an-end. It is influence based on power (manipulative skill, resources that can be used to reward or punish, legitimacy) and on the pretense of respect (trust, liking, expertise).

There is an idea in moral philosophy that says that people are special, and should never be used as means to an end. To do so is immoral. And so, many people consider the kind of persuasion we've been talking about as intrinsically immoral. We shouldn't be doing it!

But there are circumstances where we would like to influence others because we care about them or about humanity or about the planet. We would like to teach our children how to be happy and productive adults. We would like to teach unskilled people skills, unhappy people how to be happy, uncaring people to care.... These are, most of us feel, moral things to do. So are there ways of persuading that are not instrumental?

There is, of course, another kind of persuasion, a natural influence, based truly on respect. This hasn't been explored nearly as much. What do you expect in our instrumental society, where we even read books that purport to give us techniques for "making friends?" But there are some examples, mostly from the worlds of education and therapy.

### Education

It's an amazing thing how babies and young children love to learn! But as we get older, something seems to happen to our love of learning. By the time we get to college, learning is like root canal work! Teachers – persuaders of a sort – would like to rekindle some of that love of learning somehow. Perhaps we could inject older students with baby hormones or something.

But it's not so much the student that's changed: It's the learning. You see, as a little kid, you were learning what you wanted to learn, and so you wanted to learn it. It was meaningful to you, desirable, an intrinsically valuable behavior.


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Now, you are trying, much of the time, to learn what other people want you to learn: calculus, Shakespeare, chemistry, art appreciation.... Some may appeal to you; others bore you to tears. Notice the difference between a course you love and a course you hate. Notice the ease with which you study, remember, and recall material for tests in the ones you like. Or look at the difference between reading a book for pleasure and reading one as an assignment. Or look a the difference between work and a hobby....

Most education, today as ever, is a matter of "the carrot and the stick" – rewards and punishments, smiley faces, gold stars, grades, and diplomas. What we should be doing a lot more is showing students how our subjects are meaningful to them! Then there would be little need for grades and other "motivators."

One thing we can do is to try to make education a little more entertaining – films, jokes, etc. That is nice, but it is only surface work. People remember what was meaningful to them in the class – the films, the jokes....

Better is to relate the material to people's day-to-day lives, for example by using many examples or by telling stories. Another way is to get people more actively involved in the subject, having them do their own studies, or having help groups. Best would be to let people find their own way to competency... but our educational systems are far from ready for that yet.

Meaningful teaching just isn't appreciated by administrators or even many teachers: If your not busy cramming facts into students' heads, they think you're not doing anything. And heaven forbid you should try to get around the grading system!

Funny thing is, students don't seem to appreciate it either! They are used to the system. If they don't have to grunt and groan over textbooks and tests, if they actually have a good time, they figure it's a "Mickey Mouse" course. Consider: If you learn something pleasantly, you don't think of it as work, and if it wasn't work, then it must not be too important.

## Therapy

Another area where the use of instrumental versus non-instrumental influence is an issue is therapy. If we would like to see someone in control of their own life, free to actualize their potentials, it doesn't make a lot of sense to manipulate and control them into it. There's got to be a better way!

An example is George Kelly's fixed-role therapy. Here you can see how respect means not controlling.

The therapist asks the client to write a self-description – to describe himself or herself in the third person. The therapist then analyzes the self-description for the kinds of key social constructs he or she uses.

Since the client is presumably unhappy, the way in which he sees himself and others may be at the root of that unhappiness. To use myself as an example, I once tended to use constructs such as genius-idiot and success-failure. So, if I couldn't prove myself to be a genius and a success – a tough job – the only thing left for me was to be a failure and an idiot. And I measured others the same way!

So the therapist writes another description called the fixed-role sketch, using constructs that are independent of the original ones, but which cover a similar "domain." For example, skilled-unskilled and respected-not respected cover similar circumstances as genius-idiot and success-failure, but are not tied to them in any way. Usually the therapist will use the more positive ends of the new constructs, e.g. skilled and respected, at first.

The therapist then asks the client to play this role for a week or two, all day, everyday, with everybody! Usually, clients find it easy, even fun, to do. Sometimes they come back and tell the therapist that it was great and that they are now going to be this new person. Then the therapist may give them another fixed-role sketch, perhaps even with a few negative qualities thrown in!

The idea is not for the therapist to tell the client what to be, but to show the client that alternatives are possible, and that he is free to choose. Compare this with the goals of advertising!


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## Dialog

Another aspect of natural influence is a mutuality of respect that allows the "source" and the "target" to enter into a dialog. In fact, what constitutes a "source" and what a "target" tends to get rather blurred, and teachers or therapists often find themselves learning as much from the interaction as (or more than) their students or clients.

For example, Carl Rogers suggested that there are three things a therapist must show a client in order for the client to improve: congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard.

Congruence means honesty – not being defensive, and not being manipulative; knowing your own feelings and communicating them.

Empathy means understanding, being open to others, making an effort at seeing things from their perspective.

Unconditional positive regard means respect, a kind of affection or warmth given regardless of how pleasant or unpleasant the person is.

Now, even as the client, I can tell when someone is congruent or not: When someone is screaming "I am not angry!" I know they are angry, but not congruent. Congruency has a natural simplicity or balance to it. I can feel it.

And when a congruent person is listening carefully and asking me to explain myself when they don't follow (a congruent person is not afraid to ask!), then I feel understood.

And when I see someone making such an effort at understanding me, I feel valued and respected.

Now, when I feel the therapist's congruence, empathy, and respect, I feel less threatened, less need to be defensive. I can be more honest, more congruent – say what I mean rather than what I think will impress you.

And, as I feel more congruent, I can open up more. The therapist isn't the enemy anymore. I can afford to listen to and make an effort at understanding the therapist as a fellow human being. I can become more empathic.

And, as I come to see things through the therapist's eyes, I can begin to feel respect for the therapist. I can give the therapist the same unconditional positive regard the therapist has given me.

In other words, beginning with one congruent, empathic, respectful person, we end with two. And the honesty, understanding, and respect the client now shows the therapist helps the therapist maintain and improve his own honesty, understanding, and respect – i.e. therapy is therapeutic to the therapist.

Rogers does go out on a limb at this point and says one more thing: That the three qualities are necessary and sufficient for helping. You must have them to help others, but they are all you need. Nothing more. So, when you are honest, understanding, and respectful of others, you inevitably help them and yourself. Compassion breeds compassion.

## Awareness

One final point: We can become better human beings if we learn to be more open to the world around us – especially to other people. So often, we see what we want to see, instead of what is really there. We have all sorts of preconceptions and prejudices, and our natural conservative natures lead us to confirm them when we can, and to ignore contradictory information when those preconceptions fail. You remember, I'm sure, our discussions of balance theories and prejudice!

In order to become more open, we need to do two things: First, we have to get to know our biases. We have to look at the assumptions we make, the prejudices we have, the inferiorities that may be motivating us, and so on. We also have to look at our culture and upbringing: What kinds of things did we learn as truth, yet never saw proof or evidence of?


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The second thing we need to do is broaden our range of experiences. Get to know people who are different from you. Make friends with people of the other gender, another sexual orientation, older than you, younger than you, of a different ethnic background, a different nationality, a different social class, a different religion or political view, from a different part of the country or a different environment. Read literature and history books. Learn other languages, read other literatures. Travel, explore, hang out. If you challenge the limits of your understanding, even if it sometimes hurts a bit, you will be rewarded.

Awareness, compassion, freedom, meaningfulness – these are things that lead to a higher quality of life, for yourself, for those around you, and ultimately for everyone.


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