Social psychology

Supported GRE teaching and original transfer practice

Social psychology

- Use **attribution** to separate situational from dispositional causes.
- Separate **conformity** from obedience, and normative from informational influence.
- Explain when attitudes predict behaviour.
- Judge evidence about groups, with attention to selection and ethics.

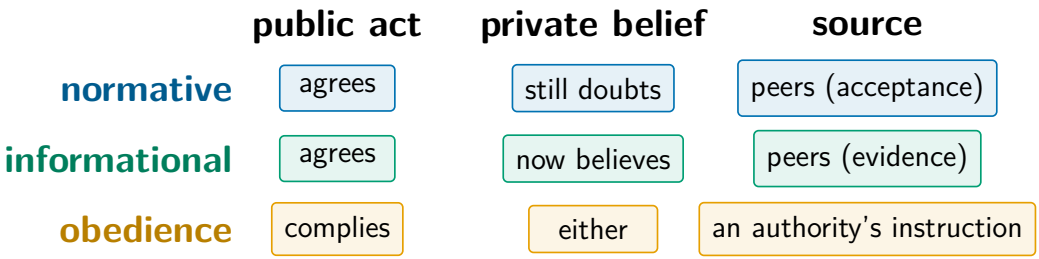
Attribution

- A dispositional explanation points to the person ("she is careless"); a situational one points to the circumstances ("the road was icy").
- The fundamental **attribution** error over-uses dispositional explanations for other people.
- One action under strong pressure says little about a person's stable traits.

Social influence

- Normative influence: agreeing in public to be accepted, while privately doubting.
- Informational influence: agreeing because others seem to know, and coming to believe it.
- Obedience: following an instruction from an authority.
- The same public act can come from any of the three; private belief and the presence of an authority tell them apart.

Figure: Social influence



- The same public act, three different routes.
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Attitudes and behaviour

- Attitudes predict behaviour better when they are specific to the behaviour, strong, and measured close in time to it.
- General attitudes ("I care about the environment") predict specific acts (taking the bus today) weakly.
- Situational pressures, such as a customer standing in front of you, can override an attitude.
- Cognitive dissonance works the other way: behaviour can change attitudes.

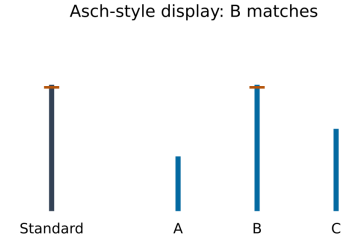
Groups

- Others' presence helps easy tasks and hurts hard ones (social facilitation); pooled effort falls (social loafing).
- Bystanders help less when there are more of them.
- Stereotypes (beliefs), prejudice (feelings) and discrimination (actions) are different.
- Group differences need careful evidence: who was sampled, what norms applied, and what opportunities people had.

Worked example: public and private answers

- The public–private difference fits normative influence.
- It is not obedience, because no authority gave an order.
- The motive (fear of rejection) is still an inference. Asking the pupil afterwards, or making answers anonymous, would test it.

Figure: Worked example: public and private answers



Stimulus schematic; the drawing does not measure conformity.

- The correct answer is unambiguous, so any conforming errors come from social pressure
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Worked example: a generous club

- This does not show that joining causes generosity. Generous people may choose to join (selection).
- A better design measures helping before and after joining, or compares people randomly offered membership with others not yet offered it.
- Any such study must obtain informed consent and avoid harm.

Common errors

- Inferring a stable trait from one action under pressure.
- Calling any group pressure obedience.
- Expecting general attitudes to predict specific actions well.

Common errors (2)

- Treating a correlation between group membership and behaviour as a cause.
- Using stereotype, prejudice and discrimination as synonyms.

Key terms

- **attribution**: An explanation of the cause of behaviour, by the person or by the situation.
- **conformity**: Changing behaviour or judgement to match a group.

Check yourself

- A soldier fires because an officer orders it. **Conformity** or obedience?
- Which attitude better predicts recycling next week: "I care about nature" or "I intend to recycle my bottles"?
- A student agrees with friends in public and changes her private view too. Which influence is this?