# Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes

# 18

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter you should appreciate that:

■ the presence of other people can have significant effects on our behaviour;

■ under certain conditions people obey the orders of an authority figure to the extent of harming innocent others;

■ social support and close interpersonal relationships benefit our health and happiness;

■ membership of groups can have both positive and negative consequences on people's behaviour and judgement, depending on the context;

■ membership of groups can help us to withstand authoritarian influences, but it can also inhibit our tendency to help others and can increase prejudice and conflict;

■ knowledge of the interpersonal processes and mechanisms involved can help to reduce the negative aspects of group membership.

# INTRODUCTION

One of the most distinctive aspects of human beings is that we are social. We are each affected by the presence of other people, we form relationships with other people, we join groups with other people, and we behave in certain ways towards members of our own and other groups.

The previous chapter focused on various aspects of social evaluation and how we process social information – intra-personal processes. In this chapter, we look more broadly at the ways in which our behaviour is genuinely social. How are we influenced by, and how do we influence, other people?

First, we here ask the elementary question of how we are affected by simply being in the presence of other people. We then look at ways in which people interact with one another – particularly how people form close relationships with one another. Next, we look at how people in groups, and how groups as a whole, behave. How does being in a group affect what we think and do? How do groups perform typical group tasks and activities?

Finally, we consider how groups interact with and perceive one another; how people as group members relate to people who are not in their group; and how both cooperative and competitive forms of intergroup behaviour arise and can be changed.

# INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

## BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF OTHER PEOPLE

### Social facilitation

Intuitively, most of us probably think the term 'social' means doing things with (or being in the presence of) other people, and that social psychology is therefore about the causes and effects of this 'social presence'. Although social psychologists use the term 'social' in a much broader way than this, the effect of the physical presence of other people on our behaviour remains an important research question (Guerin, 1993).

In fact, in 1898 Triplett designed one of the earliest social psychology experiments to address this very question. He discovered from analysis of published records that cyclists go faster when paced by another cyclist, and he decided to investigate this phenomenon under more controlled conditions. Triplett had 40 children reel in fishing lines, either alone or in pairs, and he discovered that the children tended to perform the task more quickly when in the presence of someone else doing the same task. Triplett attributed this 'quickening effect' to the arousal of a competitive instinct.

> **social facilitation** an increase in dominant responses in the presence of others of the same species, leading to improved performance on well-learned/easy tasks and deterioration in performance on poorly learned/difficult tasks

Some years later, F. Allport (1920) coined the term *social facilitation* to refer to a more clearly defined effect in which the mere presence of conspecifics (i.e. members of the same species) would improve individual task performance. These conspecifics might be co-actors (i.e. doing the same task but not interacting) or simply a passive audience (i.e. observing the task performance).

Research (much of it with an exotic array of different species) seemed to confirm this. We now know that cockroaches run faster, chickens, fish and rats eat more, and pairs of rats copulate more when being 'watched' by members of their own species (see Zajonc, Heingartner & Herman, 1969). However, later research found that the presence of conspecifics sometimes impairs performance, although it was often unclear what degree of social presence produced impairment (i.e. coaction or a passive audience).

Zajonc (1965) put forward a drive theory to explain social facilitation effects. He argued that, because people are unpredictable, the mere presence of a passive audience instinctively and automatically produces increased arousal and motivation. This was proposed to act as a drive that produces dominant responses for that situation (i.e. well learned, instinctive or habitual behaviours that take precedence over alternative responses under conditions of heightened arousal or motivation). But do dominant responses improve task performance? Zajonc argued that if the dominant response is the correct behaviour for that situation (e.g. pedalling when we get on a bicycle), then social presence improves performance (social facilitation). But if the dominant response is an
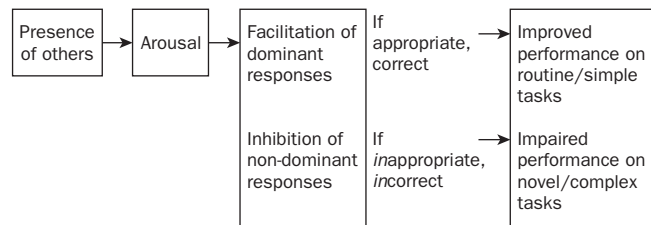


**Figure 18.1**

Zajonc's (1965) explanation of social facilitation/inhibition. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001).

incorrect behaviour (e.g. trying to write notes in a lecture before we have understood properly what is being said), then social presence can impair performance (social inhibition) (see figure 18.1 and Markus, 1978).

Zajonc believed that drive was an innate reaction to the mere presence of others. Other views are that drive results from an acquired apprehension about being evaluated by others (Cottrell, 1972) or from conflict between paying attention to a task and to an audience (e.g. Sanders, 1981). Still other researchers discard the notion of drive entirely. They suggest that social facilitation may occur because of distraction and subsequent narrowing of attention, which hinders performance of poorly learned or difficult tasks but leaves unaffected or improves performance of well learned or easy tasks (Baron, 1986; Manstead & Semin, 1980).

Alternatively, social presence might motivate concern with self-presentation – i.e. how we appear to others (rather than concern specifically about being evaluated by them) (Bond, 1982) or make us more self-aware (Wicklund, 1975). This might then increase cognitive effort, which is considered to improve performance on easy tasks but not on difficult tasks (where failure and social embarrassment might be anticipated).

Overall, then, the empirical finding from this body of research is that the presence of others improves performance on easy tasks, but impairs performance on difficult tasks (see Bond & Titus, 1983). But no single explanation seems to account for social facilitation and social inhibition effects (Guerin, 1993). Instead, several concepts – including arousal, evaluation apprehension, and distraction conflict – are involved.

### Bystander apathy and intervention

One type of behaviour that might be affected by the presence of other people is our inclination to offer help to someone who needs it. This question can be studied from many perspectives. One of these is evolutionary psychology – do people help others simply as members of their own species, or only those with whom they shares genes? (see Batson, 1983; and Dawkins', 1976, notion of the 'selfish gene'). Another perspective is that of socialization – do we learn to help others as a result of direct instructions, reinforcement, social learning and modelling (see Bandura, 1973)?

Two of the most important lines of research on helping by social psychologists have focused on situational factors that

encourage or discourage helping, and on what motives may underlie helping others.

**bystander intervention** occurs when an individual breaks out of the role as a bystander and helps another person in an emergency

A critical feature of the immediate situation that determines whether by standers help someone who is in need of help (*bystander intervention*) is the number of potential helpers who are present. This approach was stimulated by the widely reported murder of Kitty Genovese in New York in 1964: although 38 people admitted witnessing the murder, not a single person ran to her aid. To explain bystander intervention (or its opposite – apathy), Darley, Latané and others carried out a series of classic experiments (Darley & Batson, 1973; Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Rodin, 1969).

Numerous studies indicate that the willingness to intervene in emergencies is higher when a bystander is alone (Latané & Nida, 1981). In one of the first experiments showing this effect (Latané & Rodin, 1969), students overheard that a woman working in the office next door had climbed onto a chair, fallen on the floor and lay moaning in pain. This incident lasted 130 seconds. In one condition, the student who overheard the information was alone. In a second condition, another student (a confederate of the experimenter, who had been instructed to be passive) was also present. In a third condition, the student participant was with a stranger at the time of the accident, and in a fourth condition the student participant was with a friend.

Although two people could have intervened in the third and fourth conditions, in only 40 per cent of stranger dyads and 70 per cent of friend dyads did at least one student intervene. The individual likelihood of intervention has to be calculated according to a special formula that corrects for the fact that two people are free to act in two conditions (with stranger; with friend), but only one person is free to act in the remaining two conditions (with passive confederate; alone). The individual likelihood of intervention was in fact twice as high when students were with a friend (i.e. fourth condition) compared with a stranger (i.e. third condition). Both of these corrected intervention rates for the third and fourth conditions were lower than in the condition where the participant was alone (first condition), but higher than in the second condition, where there was a passive confederate present at the time of the accident (see figure 18.3).

Subsequent research indicated that three types of social process seem to cause the social inhibition of helping in such situations:

1. diffusion of responsibility (when others are present, our own perceived responsibility is lowered);
2. ignorance about how others interpret the event; and
3. feelings of unease about how our own behaviour will be evaluated by others present.

So, witnesses to the Kitty Genovese murder may have failed to intervene because:

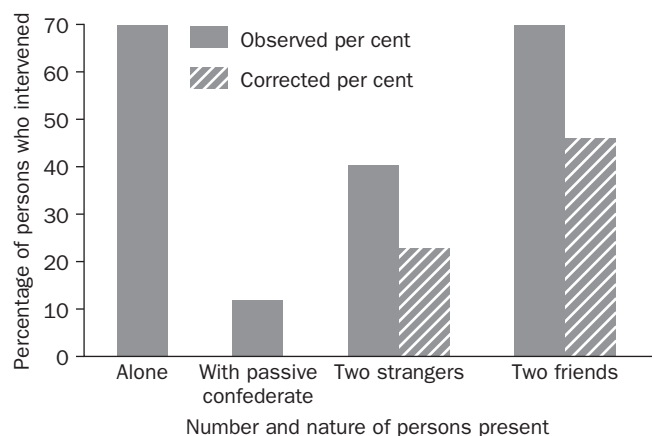1. they saw other people present, and so did not feel responsible;



**Figure 18.2**

When there are several bystanders, it is less likely that a victim will receive help.



**Figure 18.3**

The effect of the presence and identity of others on bystander intervention in an emergency. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Latané & Rodin (1969).

2. they were unsure about how the others present interpreted the situation; and

3. they were embarrassed about how they might look if they rushed in to help when, for some reason, this might be inappropriate.

On the basis of studies such as this, Latané and Darley (1970) proposed a cognitive model of bystander intervention. Helping (or not) was considered to depend on a series of decisions:

1. noticing that something is wrong;
2. defining it as an emergency;
3. deciding whether to take personal responsibility;
4. deciding what type of help to give; and
5. implementing the decision.

Bystanders also seem to weigh up costs and benefits of intervention vs. apathy before deciding what to do. Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner and Clark (1981) proposed a bystander calculus model that assigns a key role to arousal. They proposed that emergencies make us aroused, situational factors determine how that arousal is labelled and what emotion is felt (see chapter 6), and then we assess the costs and benefits of helping or not helping before deciding what to do.

To summarize findings from this area of research, the presence of multiple bystanders seems the strongest inhibitor of bystander intervention due to diffusion of personal responsibility, fear of social blunders and social reinforcement for inaction. In addition, the costs of not helping are apparently reduced by the presence of other potential helpers. People tend to help more if they are alone or among friends, if situational norms or others' behaviour prescribe helping, if they feel they have the skills to offer effective help, or if the personal costs of not helping are high.

## *Motives for helping*

A rather different line of research has concentrated on the motives underlying helping (or, more generally, prosocial behaviour) – in particular, whether people help for altruistic or egoistic motives. A discussion of the genetic argument is beyond this chapter (see Dawkins, 1976; Bierhoff, 2002).

Batson and colleagues (1981) had female students observe 'Elaine', an experimental confederate, who was apparently receiving electric shocks. In the second trial of the experiment, Elaine appeared to be suffering greatly from the shocks, at which point the experimenter asked the female observer whether she would be willing to continue with the experiment by taking Elaine's place.

In one condition, participants believed that Elaine shared many attitudes with them. In another condition, they were led to think that she held dissimilar attitudes. The experiment also manipulated difficulty of escape. In the 'easy escape' condition, participants knew that they could leave the observation room after the second trial, which meant that they would not be forced to continue observing Elaine's plight if the experiment continued with her. In the 'difficult escape' condition, they were instructed to observe the victim through to the end of the study.
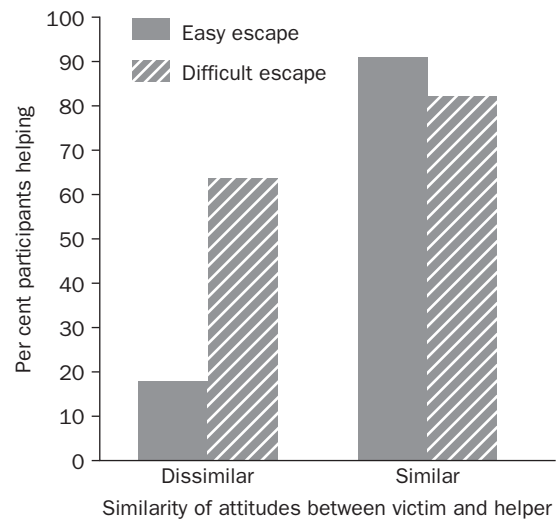


### Figure 18.4

Percentage of participants who helped Elaine, depending on similarity/empathy and difficulty of escape. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Batson et al. (1981).

As figure 18.4 shows, participants only took up the option offered by the 'easy escape' condition and failed to help when the victim had dissimilar attitudes. These results were interpreted as being consistent with the hypothesis that high attitude similarity increases altruistic motivation, whereas low attitude similarity encourages egoistic motivation.

Batson's altruism theory was opposed by the view that people were, in fact, helping for selfish, rather than altruistic, motives. So helping could sometimes be motivated by an egoistic desire to gain relief from a negative state (such as distress, guilt or unhappiness) when faced with another person in need of help. Although a meta-analysis by Carlson and Miller (1987) did not support this idea, there is continued controversy between the 'altruists' and 'egoists' as to why we help others (see Batson et al., 1997; Cialdini et al., 1997; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988). Batson (e.g., 1991) continues to maintain that helping under the conditions investigated by him is motivated positively by the feeling of 'situational empathy', rather than by an egoistic desire to relieve the 'situational distress' of watching another person suffer.

Helping is also increased by prosocial societal or group norms. These can be general norms of reciprocity ('help those who help you'; Gouldner, 1960) or social responsibility ('help those in need;' Berkowitz, 1972), or more specific helping norms tied to the nature of a social group (e.g. 'we should help older people'). Other factors that increase helping include being in a good mood (Isen, 1987) and assuming a leadership role in the situation (Baumeister, Chesner, Senders & Tice, 1988). Research has also shown that, relative to situational variables, personality and gender are poor predictors of helping (Huston & Korte, 1976; Latané & Darley, 1970).

Note that many of these studies on helping are 'high impact' experiments – fascinating to read about but potentially distressing to participate in. Because of the greater sensitivity to ethical issues

in research today (see chapter 2), it would be difficult now to conduct some of these studies, as well as other studies described in this chapter.

## THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHORITY

The research on both social facilitation and helping shows that the mere presence of other people can have a clear effect on behaviour. But this effect can be tremendously amplified if those others actively try to influence us – for example, from a position of authority.

Legitimate authority figures can be particularly influential; they can give orders that people blindly obey without really thinking about the consequences. This has been the focus of one of social psychology's most significant and socially meaningful pieces of research (Blass, 2000; Miller, 1986; Miller, Collins & Brief, 1995). Milgram (1963; and see chapter 1) discovered that quite ordinary people taking part in a laboratory experiment were prepared to administer electric shocks (450V), which they believed would harm another participant, simply because an authoritative experimenter told them to do so. This study showed that apparently 'pathological' behaviour may not be due to individual pathology (the participants were 'normal') but to particular social circumstances. The situation encouraged extreme obedience.

Milgram (1965, 1974) subsequently conducted a whole series of studies using this paradigm. One of his most significant findings was that social support is the single strongest moderator of the effect. So, obedience is strengthened if others are obedient, and massively reduced if others are disobedient.

Milgram investigated the role of peer pressure by creating a situation with three 'co-teachers', the participant and two confederates. The first confederate presented the task, the second registered the learner's responses, and the participant actually administered the shocks. At 150V, the first confederate refused to continue and took a seat away from the shock generator. At 210V, the second confederate refused to continue. The effect of their behaviour on the participants was dramatic: only 10 per cent of the participants were now maximally obedient (see figure 18.5). In contrast, if the teacher administering the learning task was accompanied by a co-teacher, who gave the shocks, 92 per cent of the participants continued to be obedient to the end of the study. The powerful role of interpersonal factors (i.e. peers who had the temerity to disobey) was evident from this investigation (see Blass, 2000).

One unanticipated consequence of Milgram's research was a fierce debate about the ethics of social psychological research (Baumrind, 1985; Miller, 1986). Although no electric shocks were actually given in Milgram's study, participants genuinely believed that they were administering shocks and showed great distress. Was it right to conduct this study?

This debate led to strict guidelines for psychological research. Three of the main components of this code are (i) that participants must give their fully informed consent to take part, (ii) that they can withdraw at any point without penalty, and (iii) that after participation they must be fully debriefed (see discussion of research ethics in chapter 2).
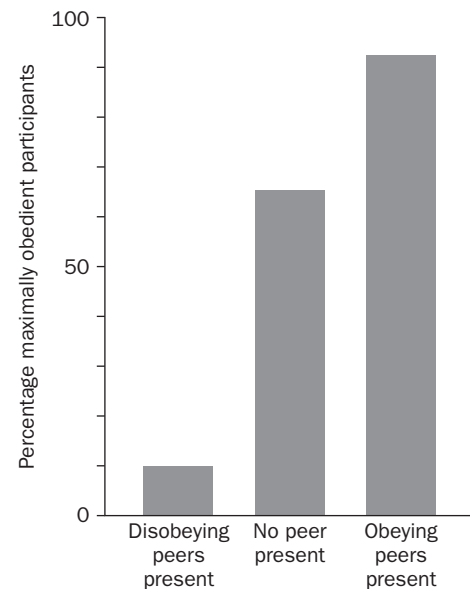


**Figure 18.5**

Obedience as a function of peer behaviour. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), data from Milgram (1974).

## AFFILIATION, ATTRACTION AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

### *Seeking the company of others*

Human beings have a strong need to affiliate with other people, through belonging to groups and developing close interpersonal relationships. The consequences of social deprivation are severely maladaptive (ranging from loneliness to psychosis), and social isolation is a potent punishment that can take many forms (solitary confinement, shunning, ostracism, the 'silent treatment').

Most of us choose to spend a great deal of time with others, especially when we experience threat (Schachter, 1959) or feel anxious (Buunk, 1995). Our motives for affiliation include *social comparison* (we learn about ourselves, our skills, abilities, perceptions and attitudes; Festinger, 1954), anxiety reduction (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1997) and information seeking (Shaver & Klinnert, 1982). Hospitals now routinely encourage surgical patients who have undergone the same medical procedure to talk to others to help reduce anxiety (Gump & Kulik, 1997).

**social comparison** the act of comparing oneself, usually with similar others, to assess one's attitudes, abilities, behaviours and emotions; these comparisons are most likely to occur when people are uncertain about themselves

People usually seek out and maintain the company of people they like. We tend to like others whom we consider physically attractive, and who are nearby, familiar and available, and with

## Milgram's study of obedience

### The research issue

There were two significant triggers for this research. First, Milgram wanted to understand how individual acts of obedience could have taken place that led to the systematic annihilation of the Jews during the Holocaust. Second, he was fascinated with the trial in Jerusalem of the arch-architect of the 'Final Solution', Adolf Eichmann.

Milgram wondered whether most people would show destructive obedience and, prior to this research, he doubted it. Indeed, this study represents what was intended to be the 'baseline', a situation in which few people were expected to obey. The original idea was that later research would then manipulate key variables, and investigate their impact on rates of obedience (see Milgram, 1965, 1974).

This study is one of the most widely known in psychology – because of what it found, as well as the ethical issues it raised about social-psychological research.

### Design and procedure

The work was conducted at Yale University. Forty males (aged 20–50 years) drawn from in and around the city of New Haven, Connecticut (USA), were recruited to participate in a study on 'memory and learning'. No mention was made at any stage that the study concerned obedience.

There was no experimental design as such, because no factors were manipulated. The teacher–learner scenario was explained, and participants were led to believe that roles had been determined by chance, although the 'victim' (the 'learner') was, in fact, an experimental confederate (i.e. he was instructed how to behave by the experimenter). The experimenter explained that, by means of a 'shock generator', the participant (as 'teacher') was to deliver increasingly more intense electric shocks to the 'learner' each time they made a mistake on the learning task. The shock generator had a row of 30 push-buttons, each marked by the appropriate intensity (from 15 V to 450 V). Successive shock levels were clarified by verbal labels ranging from slight shock (to 60 V), through moderate shock (to 120 V), strong shock (to 180 V) and very strong shock (to 240 V), to intense shock (to 300 V), extreme intensity shock (to 360 V) and 'danger: severe shock' (to 420 V). The two final shock levels were marked 'XXX'. In fact, no shocks were delivered, but the teacher did not know this as the learner pretended to suffer, convincing the participants that they were administering real shocks.

The procedure was carefully scripted so that the experimental scenario had a very high impact on participants, without sacrificing control over the situation. Both the victim's responses (a predetermined set of grunts, screams etc.) and the experimenter's commands (four levels of 'prods') were held constant throughout the study.

The study ended with a detailed debriefing, which included uniting the participant with the victim and conveying the assurance that no shocks had in fact been delivered in the study.

### Results and implications

No statistics are reported on the data, nor are they needed, since no experimental variations were compared in the study. The primary dependent measure was the maximum shock a participant administered before refusing to go any further, on a scale from 0 (i.e. refusing to administer the first shock) to 30 (a 450 V shock). Unexpectedly, given Milgram's prior suppositions, no participant discontinued before administering at least a 300 V shock. Across the sample, maximal obedience was shown by 26 of 40 respondents, or 65 per cent (see table 18.1). Milgram concluded that ordinary people were capable of high levels of destructive obedience in response to strong situational pressures.

This study triggered an outcry regarding ethical issues. Milgram was severely criticized for inducing suffering in his participants.

Could this extent of suffering be dealt with in normal debriefing? How might participants be affected by learning that they could be so easily deceived and that they were (apparently) capable of committing great harm under instruction? Should the experiment have even been carried out? Was the research sufficiently important to justify such deception and stress? These are just some of the issues that you may wish to reflect upon . . .

Milgram, S., 1963, 'Behavioral study of obedience', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67, 371–8.

**Table 18.1** Number of participants who proceeded to each level of shock.

| Verbal designation and shock indication | No. of participants for whom this was maximum shock level |
| --- | --- |
| Slight shock (15–60 volts) | 0 |
| Moderate shock (75–120 volts) | 0 |
| Strong shock (135–180 volts) | 0 |
| Very strong shock (195–240 volts) | 0 |
| Intense shock (255–300 volts) | 5 |
| Extreme intensity shock (315–360 volts) | 8 |
| Danger: severe shock (375–420 volts) | 1 |
| XXX (435–450 volts) | 26 |

Source: Adapted from Milgram (1963).

whom we expect continued interaction. How many of your friends at college live close to you on campus? The likely answer is 'many of them' (see Festinger, Schachter & Back, 1950). We also tend to like people who have similar attitudes and values to our own (Byrne, 1971), especially when these attitudes and values are personally important to us.

## The importance of social support

**social support** the feeling of being supported by others, whether in one's broader social network (which impacts positively on health and stress) or within a small group (which helps one to resist pressures to comply with an outside majority or obey an immoral authority)

Generally, having appropriate *social support* is a very powerful 'buffer' against stressful events. Cohen and Hoberman (1983) found that, among individuals who felt that their life was very stressful, those who perceived themselves to have low social support reported many more physical symptoms (e.g. headaches, insomnia) than those who felt they had high social support (see figure 18.6). Overall, the evidence is clear – social integration is good for our physical and psychological health (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1997).

## Social exchange theory

**social exchange theory** a general theoretical model that views relationships in terms of rewards and costs to participants; expected outcomes are based on personal standards, prior experience, partner's outcomes, and the outcomes of comparable others

A general theoretical framework for the study of interpersonal relationships is *social exchange theory* (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This approach regards relationships as effectively trading interactions, including goods (e.g. birthday presents), information (e.g.
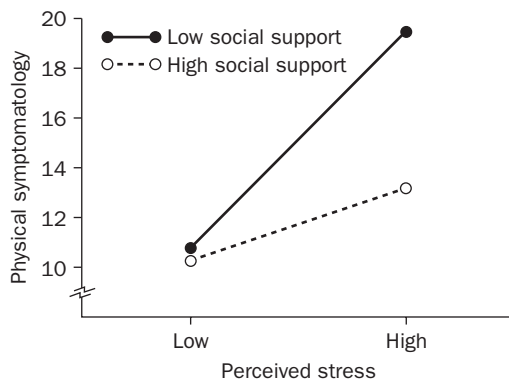


**Figure 18.6**

The relationship between perceived stress and physical symptomatology for individuals low and high in social support. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Cohen and Hoberman (1983).

advice), love (affection, warmth), money (things of value), services (e.g. shopping, childcare) and status (e.g. evaluative judgements). A relationship continues when both partners feel that the benefits of remaining in the relationship outweigh the costs and the benefits of other relationships.

According to this framework, these considerations apply to even our most intimate friendships. We now turn to a consideration of these closest relationships in our lives. It is argued that these relationships are also based on complex cost–benefit analyses ('she brings the money in and is practical, but I have a secure pension and do more for the children'). According to the more specific *equity theory*, partners in such relationships are happier if they feel that both partners' outcomes are proportional to their inputs, rather than one partner receiving more than they give (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978).

**equity theory** assumes that satisfaction in a relationship is highest when the ratio of one's own outcomes to inputs is equal to that of a referenced other (individuals will try to restore equity when they find themselves in an inequitable situation)

## Happy vs. distressed relationships

A major characteristic of happy, close relationships is a high degree of intimacy. According to Reis and Patrick (1996), we view our closest relationships as intimate if we see them as:

- caring (we feel that the other person loves and cares about us);
- understanding (we feel that the other person has an accurate understanding of us); and
- validating (our partner communicates his or her acceptance, acknowledgement and support for our point of view).

Unhappy or 'distressed' relationships, on the other hand, are characterized by higher rates of negative behaviour, reciprocating with such negative behaviour when the partner behaves negatively towards us. Reciprocation, or retaliation, is the most reliable sign of relationship distress (Fincham, 2003). Those in unhappy relationships also tend to ignore or cover up differences (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990), compare themselves negatively with other couples (Buunk et al., 1990) and perceive their relationship as less equitable than others (van Yperen & Buunk, 1991). They also make negative causal attributions of their partner's behaviours and characteristics (Fincham & Bradbury, 1991). For example, being given flowers might be explained away with 'He's just trying to deal with his guilt; he'll be the same as usual tomorrow.' In a happy relationship, the explanation is more likely to be something like 'It was nice of him to find time for that; I know how stressed he is at the moment.'

## The investment model

Ultimately, what holds a relationship together is commitment – the inclination to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically

**investment model** a theory that proposes that commitment to a relationship is based upon high satisfaction, and/or a low quality of alternatives, and/or a high level of investment

attached to it (Rusbult, 1983). According to the *investment model* (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), commitment is based on one or more of the following factors: high satisfaction, low quality of alternatives, and a high level of investments. Highly committed individuals are more willing to make sacrifices for their relationship, and to continue it even when forced to give up important aspects of their life (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Close relationships do, regrettably, often dissolve, sometimes as a result of extreme levels of violence committed within intimate relationships (Gelles, 1997). The ending of a relationship is often a lengthy, complex process, with repeated episodes of conflict and reconciliation (Cate & Lloyd, 1988). Women tend to terminate intimate relationships more often than do men (Gray & Silver, 1990) and are more distressed by relationship conflict (Surra & Longstreth, 1990).

But for both partners the consequences can be devastating. The physical and mental health of divorced people is generally worse than that of married people, or even people who have been widowed or never married (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Factors that predict better adjustment to divorce include having taken the initiative to divorce, being embedded in social networks, and having another satisfying and intimate relationship (Price-Bonham et al., 1983).

## GROUP PROCESSES

### TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE GROUP

Almost all groups are structured into specific roles. People move in and out of roles, and in and out of groups. Groups are dynamic in terms of their structure and their membership. But first of all, of course, people need to join groups.

### *Joining groups*

We join groups for all sorts of reasons, but in many cases we are looking for company (e.g. friendships and hobby groups) or to get things done that we cannot do on our own (e.g. therapy groups, work groups and professional organizations). We also tend to identify with large groups (social categories) that we belong to – national or ethnic groups, political parties, religions, and so forth.

Research on group formation generally examines the process, not the reasons. One view is that joining a group is a matter of establishing bonds of attraction to the group, its goals and its members. So a group is a collection of people who are attracted to one another in such a way as to form a cohesive entity (Festinger et al., 1950). This approach has been used extensively to study the cohesiveness of military groups, organizational units and sports teams (Widmeyer, Brawley & Carron, 1985).

Another perspective, based on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), is that we affiliate with similar others in order to obtain support and consensus for our own perceptions, opinions and attitudes.

A third approach rests on social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to this framework, group formation involves a process of defining ourselves as group members, and conforming to what we see as the stereotype of our group, as distinct from other groups. We categorize ourselves in terms of our group's defining features (Hogg, 1993) – e.g. 'we are psychology students, we are studying a useful subject'. This process describes and evaluates who we are and is responsible for group phenomena such as group cohesion, conformity to norms, discrimination between different groups, and so forth.

### *Group development*

The process of joining and being influenced by a group doesn't generally happen all at once. It is an ongoing process. The relevant mechanisms have been investigated by many social psychologists interested in group development, or how groups change over time.

One very well established general model of group development is Tuckman's five-stage model (1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977):

*forming* – initially people orient themselves to one another;
*storming* – they then struggle with one another over leadership and group definition;
*norming* – this leads into agreement on norms and roles;
*performing* – the group is now well regulated internally and can perform smoothly and efficiently;
*adjourning* – this final stage involves issues of independence within the group, and possible group dissolution.

More recently, Levine and Moreland (1994) have provided a detailed account of group socialization – how groups and their members adapt to one another, and how people join groups, maintain their membership and leave groups. According to this account, groups and their members engage in an ongoing cost–benefit analysis of membership (similar to the kinds of analyses that we have already discussed as being relevant in regulating dyadic interpersonal relationships). If the benefits of the group membership outweigh the costs, the group and its members become committed to one another.

This approach highlights five generic roles that people occupy in groups:

*prospective member* – potential members reconnoitre the group to decide whether to commit;
*new member* – members learn the norms and practices of the group;
*full member* – members are fully socialized, and can now negotiate more specific roles within the group;
*marginal member* – members can drift out of step with group life, but may be re-socialized if they drift back again; and

*ex-member* – members have left the group, but previous commitment has an enduring effect on the group and on the ex-member.

Levine and Moreland believe that people move through these different roles during the lifetime of the group.

## Roles

**roles** patterns of behaviour that distinguish between different activities within a group, and that help to give the group an efficient structure

Almost all groups are internally structured into *roles*. These prescribe different activities that exist in relation to one another to facilitate overall group functioning. In addition to task-specific roles, there are also general roles that describe each member's place in the life of the group (e.g. newcomer, old-timer). Rites of passage, such as initiation rites, often mark movement between generic roles, which are characterized by varying degrees of mutual commitment between member and group.

Roles can be very real in their consequences. In the famous Stanford Prison Study (Zimbardo et al., 1982), researchers randomly assigned students to play the roles of prisoners or guards in a simulated prison set-up. The 'prison' was located in the basement of the psychology department at Stanford University. Before the study began, all participants were carefully screened to ensure they were psychologically stable. Zimbardo and his team planned to run the study for two weeks, while observing the participants. In fact, they had to terminate it after six days because the participants were conforming so extremely to their roles. The guards harassed, humiliated and intimidated the prisoners, often quite brutally, and the prisoners increasingly showed signs of individual and group disintegration, including severe emotional disturbance and some psychosomatic problems. The importance of this classic study was shown recently by the appalling treatment of Iraqi prisoners recorded inside Abu Ghraib jail in 2003.

Roles also define functions within a group, and the different parts of the group normally need to communicate with one another. Research on communication networks (Bavelas, 1968; Leavitt, 1951) focuses on centralization as the critical factor (see figure 18.7). More centralized networks have a hub person or group that regulates communication flow, whereas less centralized networks allow free communication among all roles. Centralized networks work well for simple tasks (they liberate peripheral members to perform their role) but not for more complex tasks – the hub becomes overwhelmed, delays and mis-communications occur, frustration and stress increase, and peripheral members feel loss of autonomy.

## Leadership

The most basic role differentiation within groups is into leaders and followers. Are some people 'born to lead' (think of Lady Margaret Thatcher, Sir Ernest Shackleton or Sir Alex Ferguson), or do they acquire leadership personalities that predispose them to leadership in many situations?
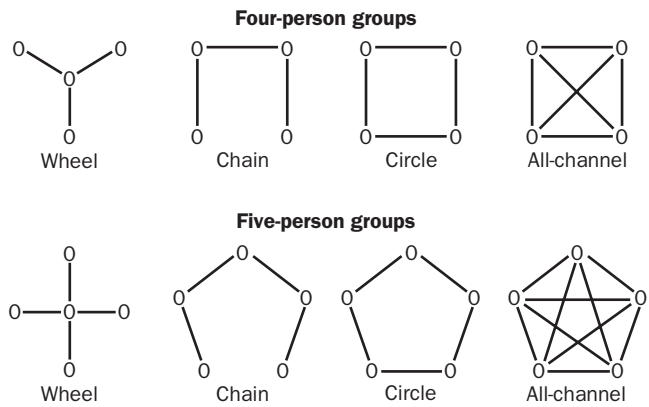


**Figure 18.7**

Some communication networks that have been studied experimentally. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Leavitt (1951).



**Figure 18.8**

Are some people 'born to lead', or do they acquire leadership personalities that predispose them to leadership?

Extensive research has revealed that there are almost no personality traits that are reliably associated with effective leadership in all situations (Yukl, 1998). This finding suggests that many of us can be effective leaders, given the right match between our leadership style and the situation. For example, leader categorization theory (Lord & Maher, 1991) states that we have leadership schemas (concerning what the leader should do and how) for different group tasks, and that we categorize people as effective leaders on the basis of their 'fit' to the task-activated schema. A

**social identity theory** theory of group membership and intergroup relations which explains much intergroup behaviour in terms of the desire to belong to groups which are valued positively compared to other non-membership groups

**contingency theory** Fiedler's interactionist theory, specifying that the effectiveness of particular leadership styles depends on situational and task factors

variant of this idea, based on *social identity theory* (see below), is that in some groups what really matters is that you fit the group's defining attributes and norms and that, if you are categorized as a good fit, you will be endorsed as an effective leader (Hogg, 2001).

Perhaps the most enduring leadership theory in social psychology is Fiedler's (1965) *contingency theory*. Fiedler believed that the effectiveness of a particular leadership style was contingent (or dependent) on situational and task demands. He distinguished between two general types of leadership style (people differ in terms of which style they naturally adopt):

- a relationship-oriented style that focuses on the quality of people's relationships and their satisfaction with group life; and
- a task-oriented style that focuses on getting the task done efficiently and well.

Relationship-oriented leaders are relaxed, friendly and sociable, and derive satisfaction from harmonious group relations. Task-oriented leaders are more aloof and directive, are not concerned with whether the group likes them, and derive satisfaction from task accomplishment.

Fiedler measured leadership style using his 'least preferred co-worker' (LPC) scale. The idea is to measure how positively a leader views the co-worker that they hold in lowest esteem. He predicted that relationship-oriented leaders would be much more positive about their least preferred co-worker than task-oriented leaders. So, for relationship-oriented leaders, even the least-liked group member is still quite liked.

Fiedler was also able to classify situations in terms of how much control was required for the group task to be effectively executed. A substantial amount of research has shown that task-oriented leaders are superior to relationship-oriented leaders when situational control is very low (i.e. poorly structured task, disorganized group) or very high (i.e. clearly structured task, highly organized group). But relationship-oriented leaders do better in situations with intermediate levels of control (Strube & Garcia, 1981).

Fiedler's model of leadership is, however, a little static. Other approaches have focused instead on the dynamic transactional relationship between leaders and followers (Hollander, 1985). According to these approaches, people who are disproportionately responsible for helping a group achieve its goals are subsequently rewarded by the group with the trappings of leadership, in order to restore equity. Hollander (1958) suggested that part of the reward for such individuals is their being able to be relatively idiosyncratic and innovative. So, people who are highly

conformist and attain leadership in a democratic manner tend to accumulate significant *idiosyncrasy credits* that they can then expend on innovation once they achieve leadership. In other words, you first have to conform before you can innovate. (For a different view to this one, see the section below on 'minority influence'.)

Leaders who have a high idiosyncrasy credit rating are imbued with charisma by the group, and may be able to function as *transformational leaders* (see chapter 20). Charismatic transformational leaders are able to motivate followers to work for collective goals that transcend self-interest and transform organizations (Bass, 1998; Bryman, 1992). They are proactive, change-orientated, innovative, motivating and inspiring and have a vision or mission with which they infuse the group. Transformational leaders are also interested in others, able to create commitment to the group and can extract extra effort from (and generally empower) members of the group.

**idiosyncrasy credits** Hollander's transactional theory proposes that followers reward leaders for achieving group goals by allowing them to be relatively idiosyncratic in their behaviour and opinions

**transformational leader** a leader seen by followers as being endowed with exceptional personal qualities, and who works to change or transform followers' needs and redirect their thinking

## HOW GROUPS INFLUENCE THEIR MEMBERS

We have seen how the presence of other people can make us less inclined to help someone, and how other people can persuade us to obey their orders. Groups can also exert enormous influence on individuals through the medium of *norms* (Turner, 1991).

**norms** attitudes and behaviours that group members are expected to show uniformly; these define group membership and differentiate between groups

## *Group norms*

Although group norms are relatively enduring, they do change in line with changing circumstances to prescribe attitudes, feelings and behaviours that are appropriate for group members in a particular context. Norms relating to group loyalty and central aspects of group life are usually more specific, and have a more restricted range of acceptable behaviour than norms relating to more peripheral features of the group. High-status group members also tend to be allowed more deviation from group norms than lower-status members (Sherif & Sherif, 1964).

Sherif (1935, 1936) carried out one of the earliest, and still most convincing, demonstrations of the impact of social norms, deliberately using an ambiguous stimulus. He placed participants alone or in groups of two or three in a completely darkened room. At a distance of about 5 m, a single and small stationary light was presented to them. In the absence of reference points, the light appeared to move rather erratically in all directions – a

**autokinetic effect** optical illusion in which a stationary point of light shining in complete darkness appears to move about

perceptual illusion known as the *autokinetic effect*.

Sherif asked his participants to call out an estimate of the extent of movement of the light, obviously without informing them of the autokinetic effect. Half of the participants made their first 100 judgements alone. On three subsequent days they went through three more sets of trials, but this time in groups of two or three. For the other half of the participants, the procedure was reversed. They underwent the three group sessions first and ended with a session alone.

Participants who first made their judgements alone developed rather quickly a standard estimate (a personal norm) around which their judgements fluctuated. This personal norm was stable within individuals, but it varied highly between individuals. In the group phases of the experiment, which brought together people with different personal norms, participants' judgements converged towards a more or less common position – a 'group norm'. With the reverse procedure employed with the other half of the participants, this group norm developed in the first session and persisted into the later session, when participants were evaluated alone.

Figure 18.9 illustrates both sets of findings. The funnel effect in the left panel reveals the convergence in the (median) judgements of three participants who first judged alone (session I) then later on in each other's presence (sessions II, III and IV). The right panel shows the judgements of a group of three participants who went through the procedure in the reverse order (i.e. first judged together, then alone). Here the group convergence is already present in the first session, and there is no sign of funnelling out in the final 'alone' session.

In subsequent studies, Sherif found that, once established, this group norm persisted, and that it strongly influenced the estimations of new members of the group.

In another study, Jacobs and Campbell (1961) used a group of confederates who unanimously agreed upon a particular judgement. After every 30 judgements, they replaced a confederate
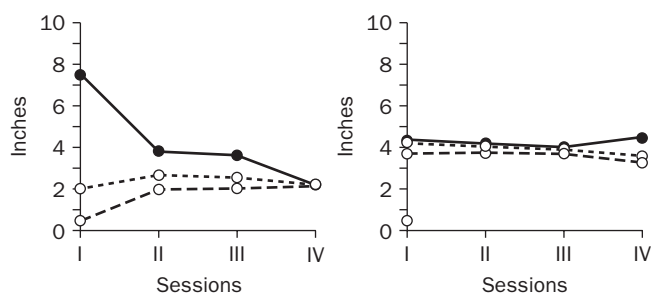


**Figure 18.9**

Median estimates of movement under solitary (I) or group (II, III, IV) conditions (left), and under group (I, II, III) or solitary (IV) conditions (right) in a research study on norm formation which used the autokinetic phenomenon. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Sherif (1935).

*Pioneer*

**Muzafer Sherif** (1906–78) made ground-breaking contributions to the psychology of attitudes, the study of group norms and intergroup relations. Born in Izmir, Turkey, he took a higher degree at Harvard and spent most of his life as professor at the University of Oklahoma. His research work on the development of group norms (using the autokinetic phenomenon) showed that other group members provide us with a frame of reference – especially, but not only, when stimuli are ambiguous. His Robber's Cave study demonstrated the powerful impact of goals on intergroup relations, and showed that group conflict is easier to induce than reduce. This research contributed to the development of his Realistic Group Conflict Theory.

by a naive participant until the whole group was made up of naive participants. Their results indicated that the norm had a significant effect on the naive participants' judgements, even after all the confederates had been removed from the judgement situation.

## *Conformity*

Sherif's autokinetic experiments show how norms develop and influence people – but the actual process through which people conform is less obvious. The participants in Sherif's study were publicly calling out their estimates of a highly ambiguous stimulus. Perhaps they were worried about looking foolish, or were simply uncertain. People may have conformed for one of two reasons, each linked to a distinct form of social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955):

1. They may have been concerned about social evaluation (e.g. being liked or being thought badly of) by the others in the group (*normative influence*).

2. They may have used the other group members' judgements as useful information to guide them in an ambiguous task on which they had no previous experience (*informational influence*).

**normative influence** social influence based on the need to be accepted and approved of by other group members

**informational influence** social influence based on acquiring new information from other group members, which is accepted as evidence about reality

A series of experiments by Asch (1951, 1952, 1956) tried to rule out informational influence by using clearly *un*ambiguous stimuli. In his first study, Asch invited students to participate in an experiment on visual discrimination. Their task was simple enough: they would have to decide which of three comparison lines was equal in length to a standard line. On each trial, one
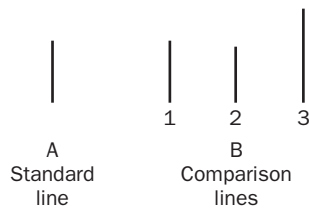
**Figure 18.10**

An example of the stimuli presented in Asch's (1956) research on conformity. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001).

comparison line was equal in length to the standard line, but the other two were different (see figure 18.10).

The task was apparently very easy: a control group (who made their judgements in isolation) made almost no errors, ruling out the informational influence component of this study. In the experimental condition, participants were seated in a semicircle and requested to give their judgements aloud, in the order in which they were seated, from position 1 to position 7. In fact, there was only one real participant, seated in position 6. All the other 'participants' were in fact confederates of the experimenter who, on each trial, unanimously gave a predetermined answer. On six 'neutral' trials (the first two trials and four other trials distributed over the remaining set), the confederates gave correct answers. On the other 12 'critical' trials, the confederates unanimously agreed on a predetermined, incorrect line. The neutral trials, particularly the first two trials, were added to avoid suspicion on the part of the real participant, and to ensure that the confederates' responses were not attributed to poor eyesight by the participant.

Like Milgram's obedience study, this paradigm had a tangible impact on the real participants. They showed signs of being uncomfortable and upset, gave the experimenter and the other participants nervous looks, sweated nervously and gesticulated in vain.

The results reveal the powerful influence of an obviously incorrect but unanimous majority on the judgements of a lone participant. In comparison with the control condition (which yielded only 0.7 per cent errors), the experimental participants made almost 37 per cent errors. Not every participant made that many errors, but only about 25 per cent of Asch's 123 participants did not make a single error. Presumably, *conformity* was produced through normative social influence operating in the line judgement task.

**conformity** social influence resulting from exposure to the opinions of a majority of group members and/or to an authority figure – typically superficial and short-lived

Subsequent Asch-type experiments have investigated how majority influence varies over a range of social situations (e.g. Allen, 1975; Wilder, 1977). These studies found that conformity reaches full strength with three to five apparently independent sources of influence. Larger groups of independent sources are not stronger, which perhaps runs counter to our intuitions, and non-independent sources (e.g. several members of the same
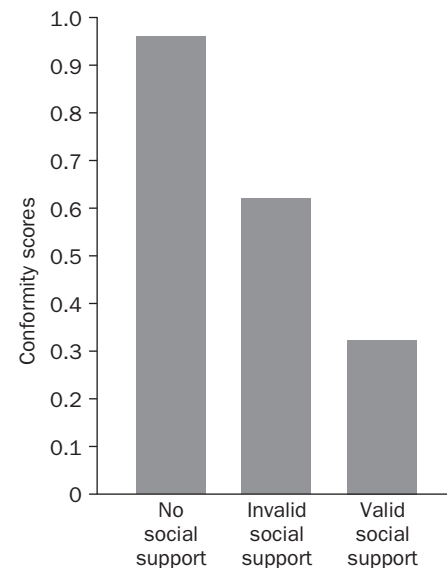
**Figure 18.11**

Conformity as a function of social support. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Allen and Levine (1971).

coalition or subgroup) are seemingly treated as a single source. Conformity is significantly reduced if the majority is not unanimous. Dissenters and deviates of almost any type can produce this effect. For example, Allen and Levine (1971) showed that conformity is even reduced by a deviate who has visibly thick lenses in his glasses, although this 'invalid' supporter had much less impact than a 'valid' supporter with no glasses (see figure 18.11).

## *Minority influence*

For most of us, conformity means coming into line with majority attitudes and behaviours. But what about minority influence?

Minorities face a social influence challenge. By definition, they have relatively few members; they also tend to enjoy little power,

can be vilified as outsiders, hold 'unorthodox' opinions, and have limited access to mainstream mass communication channels. And yet minorities often prevail, bringing about social change.

Research suggests that minorities must actively create and accentuate conflict to draw attention to themselves and achieve influence (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982). Members of the majority may be persuaded to move in the direction of the minority, in order to reduce the conflict they provoke. To have an impact, minorities need to present a message that is consistent across group members and through time, but not rigidly presented. Minorities are also more effective if they appear to be acting on principle and making personal sacrifices for their beliefs. These strategies disrupt majority consensus and raise uncertainty, draw attention to the minority as a group that is committed to its perspective, and convey a coherent alternative viewpoint that challenges the dominant majority views. It also helps if the minority can present itself as an ingroup for the majority. For example, you might be opposed to increased tuition fees at university. But a minority of students from your own university (an ingroup minority) could conceivably win you round by arguing that such fees would provide bursaries for less well-off students.

The film *Twelve Angry Men* provides a dramatic fictitious example of how minority influence occurs. Twelve jurors have to decide over the guilt or innocence of a young man charged with the murder of his father. At the outset, all but one of the jurors are convinced of the youth's guilt. The lone juror (played by Henry Fonda) actively attempts to change their minds, standing firm, committed, self-confident and unwavering. One by one the other jurors change sides, until in the end they all agree that the accused is not guilty.

Other examples of minority influence include Bob Geldof's Band Aid movement to raise money for famine relief, and new forms of music and fashion.

Moscovici (1980) proposed a dual-process theory of majority/minority influence. He suggested that people conform to majority views fairly automatically, superficially and without much thought because they are informationally or normatively dependent on the majority. In contrast, effective minorities influence by *conversion*. The deviant message achieves little influence in public, but it is processed systematically to produce influence (e.g. attitude change) that emerges later, in private and indirectly.

> **conversion** a change in covert (private) opinion after exposure to others' opinions (who often represent a minority within the group)

Subsequent research has demonstrated minority influence occurring after the main part of the experiment has finished, i.e. later, revealed by written answers rather than spoken responses, i.e. in private, and on indirectly related issues as opposed to the target issue, e.g. attitude change regarding euthanasia, following direct influence on the topic of abortion (see Wood et al., 1994).

Support for Moscovici's dual-process theory is mixed. Using the framework of cognitive theories of persuasion (see discussion of the 'elaboration likelihood model' in chapter 17), it appears that both minorities and majorities can instigate either superficial or systematic processing of their message, depending on situational factors and constraints. But overall, the weight of evidence is tipped slightly towards Moscovici's claim that minorities instigate deeper processing of their message (see Martin & Hewstone, 2003a, b).

Nemeth (1986, 1995) proposed that minorities induce more divergent thinking (thinking beyond a focal issue), whereas majorities induce more convergent thinking (concentrating narrowly on the focal issue). Evidence supporting this contention reveals that exposure to a consistent, dissenting minority leads to generation of more creative and novel judgements or solutions to problems, use of multiple strategies in problem solving, and better performance on tasks that benefit from divergent thinking (Nemeth & Kwan, 1987). In contrast, convergent thinking induced by majorities tends to lead to mere imitation of the belief or course of action that is proposed by the majority source.

## HOW GROUPS GET THINGS DONE

Most groups exist to get things done, including making decisions and collaborating on group projects. Working in groups has some obvious attractions – more hands are involved, the human resource pool is enlarged, and there are social benefits. Yet group performance is often worse than you might expect.

Potential group gains in effectiveness and creativity seem to be offset by negative characteristics of group performance, including the tendency to let others do the work, sub-optimal decision making, and becoming more extreme as a group than as individual members. As we shall see, some of these drawbacks are due to problems of coordination, and others are due to reduced individual motivation (Steiner, 1972).

### *Social loafing*

Individual motivation can suffer in groups, particularly where the task is relatively meaningless and uninvolving, the group is large and unimportant, and each individual's contribution to the group is not personally identifiable (Williams, Harkins & Latané, 1981). This phenomenon has been termed *social loafing* (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979) (see chapter 20).

> **social loafing** a reduction in individual effort when working on a collective task (in which one's outputs are pooled with those of other group members), compared with when one is working alone

Latané and colleagues asked experimental participants (who were blindfolded and wearing headsets that played loud noise) to shout as loudly as they could under three conditions: as a single individual, as a member of a dyad or as a member of a six-person group. In a further twist, this experiment also manipulated whether participants actually did shout either alone or in the presence of one or five other group members ('real groups'), or were merely led to believe that they were cheering with one or five others (while, in fact, they were shouting alone; so-called 'pseudo-groups'). The blindfolds and the headphones made this deception possible.
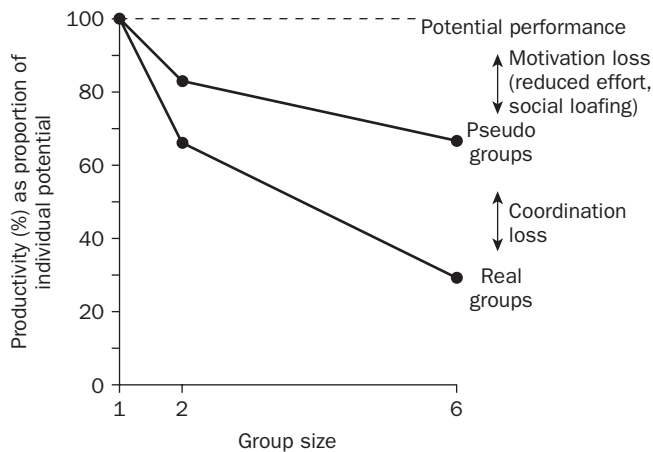
**Figure 18.12**

Intensity of sound generated *per person* (as proportion of individual potential) when cheering as a single individual, or as a member of *real* or *pseudo* two-person or six-person groups. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), based on Latané, Williams and Harkins (1979).

Although groups obviously produced more noise in total than single individuals, group productivity failed to reach its full potential, since it was found that individual productivity decreased as group size increased. In figure 18.12, the dashed line along the top represents the potential performance we would expect if there were no losses or gains as individuals were combined into groups. The line marked 'real groups' shows actual group performance.

By creating both real and pseudo groups, Latané et al. were able to estimate how much performance loss was due to coordination and motivation losses (about 50 per cent was in fact due to each). Any productivity loss observed in the pseudo groups could only be attributed to reduced motivation, not faulty coordination, since there were no 'co-workers' engaged in the shouting. In the real groups, however, coordination loss could occur due to the physical phenomenon of 'sound cancellation' – when multiple sources produce sound, some of it is cancelled out by other sound.

Subsequent research using this and similar paradigms has shown that social loafing is minimized when groups work on challenging and involving tasks, and when group members believe that their own inputs can be fully identified and evaluated through comparison with fellow members (Harkins & Jackson, 1985) or with another group (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989). In fact, when people work either on important tasks or in groups which are important to them, they may even work harder collectively than alone – so, in these circumstances, 'social loafing' turns into 'social striving' (Gabrenya, Wang & Latané, 1985; Williams, Karau & Bourgeois, 1993; Zaccaro, 1984).

### *Group decision making*

An important group function is to reach a collective decision, through discussion, from an initial diversity of views. Research



**Figure 18.13**

We often work harder on group activities, especially when the task is challenging and involving.

on *social decision schemes* identifies a number of implicit or explicit decision-making rules that groups can adopt to transform diversity into a group decision (Stasser, Kerr & Davis, 1989). These include:

> **social decision schemes** explicit or implicit decision rules specifying the processes by which individual inputs are combined into a group decision

*unanimity* – discussion puts pressure on deviants to conform;
*majority wins* – discussion confirms the majority position, which becomes the group decision;
*truth wins* – discussion reveals the position that is demonstrably correct; and
*two-thirds majority* – discussion establishes a two-thirds majority, which becomes the group decision.

The type of rule that is adopted can affect both the group atmosphere and the decision-making process (Miller, 1989). For

**Figure 18.14**

A jury rarely changes its overall decision during discussion.

example, unanimity often creates a pleasant atmosphere but can make decision making painfully slow, whereas 'majority wins' can make many group members feel dissatisfied but speeds up decision making.

Juries provide an ideal context for research on decision schemes. Not only are they socially relevant in their own right, but they can be simulated under controlled laboratory conditions. For example, Stasser, Kerr and Bray (1982) found that a two-thirds majority rule prevails in many juries. Furthermore, they discovered that it was possible to predict accurately the outcome of jury deliberations from knowledge of the initial distribution of verdict preferences ('initial' here means before any discussion has taken place). If two thirds or more initially favoured guilt, then that was the final verdict, but if there was initially no two-thirds majority, then the outcome was a hung jury.

## Group polarization and 'groupthink'

Popular opinion and research on conformity both suggest that groups are conservative and cautious entities, and that they exclude extremes by a process of averaging. But two phenomena that challenge this view are group polarization and groupthink.

*Group polarization* is the tendency for groups to make decisions that are more extreme than the average of pre-discussion opinions in the group, in the direction towards the position originally favoured by the average (Lamm & Myers, 1978; Myers, 1982). For example, four students whose averaged individual attitudes are mildly against abortion are likely to form an attitude as a group that is more extremely against abortion. Group polarization therefore makes group decisions more

**group polarization** tendency for group discussion to produce more extreme group decisions (in the same direction as the mean of the group) than would be indicated by the mean of members' pre-discussion opinions

extreme. Furthermore, it can sometimes shift individual members' enduring attitudes towards the more polarized group position.

The explanation for this lies partly in the same processes of informational and normative social influence we discussed earlier (Isenberg, 1986). Group members learn from other group members' arguments, and engage in mutual persuasion, but they are also influenced by where others stand on the issue, even if they do not hear each other's arguments.

This polarization is particularly likely to occur when an important group to which an individual belongs (i.e. an ingroup) confronts a salient group to which she does not belong (i.e. an outgroup) that holds an opposing view. Here, group members seem to conform to what they see as the prototypical view held by other ingroup members (i.e. the view or position that is most similar to that of all the other ingroup members, but most different from that of the outgroup members). It is thought that conformity to the prototypical view helps to differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup (Hogg, Turner & Davidson, 1990).

Finally, mere repetition of arguments, which also tends to occur within groups (especially when the discussion lasts a long time, and all group members wish to express their views) can also produce polarization (Brauer & Judd, 1996).

*Groupthink* is a more extreme phenomenon. Janis (1972) argued that highly cohesive groups that are under stress, insulated from external influence, and which lack impartial leadership and norms for proper decision-making procedures, adopt a mode of thinking (groupthink) in which the desire for unanimity overrides all else. The members of such groups apparently feel invulnerable, unanimous and absolutely correct. They also discredit contradictory information, pressurize deviants and stereotype outgroups.

**groupthink** a mode of thinking in highly cohesive groups in which the desire to reach unanimous agreement overrides the motivation to adopt appropriate, rational decision-making procedures

The consequences can be disastrous – particularly if the decision-making group is a government body. A dramatic example attributed to groupthink is the decision of NASA officials to press ahead with the launch of the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1986, despite warnings from engineers (see Esser & Lindoerfer, 1989). The shuttle crashed seconds into its flight (see next Everyday Psychology box).

## Brainstorming

A popular method of harnessing group potential is *brainstorming* – the uninhibited generation of as many ideas as possible, regardless of quality, in an interactive group (e.g. Stroebe & Diehl, 1994). Although it is commonly thought that brainstorming enhances individual creativity, research shows convincingly that this is not the case.

**brainstorming** technique of uninhibited generation of as many ideas as possible in a group (concerning a specific topic) to enhance group creativity

## Everyday Psychology

### The *Challenger* and *Columbia* space shuttle disasters: consequences of groupthink?

NASA's shuttle programme, initiated in the 1970s, aimed to create reusable spacecraft for transporting cargo and people into space. Previous spacecraft (such as the *Apollo* series) could only be used once and were then discarded. The first space shuttle was launched in 1981. One year later, the second shuttle of the American fleet, *Challenger*, rolled off the assembly line and flew nine successful missions before the disaster of 1986.

Shuttle mission 51L was much like most other shuttle missions, but from the beginning it was plagued by problems, with several postponements (largely related to inclement weather). Then, 73 seconds after lift-off, *Challenger* exploded, killing the entire crew.

The *Challenger* space shuttle disaster is frequently cited as an example of groupthink. It has been suggested that the organizational culture of NASA in the early 1980s discouraged dissenting opinions and encouraged risk taking. As a result, the NASA management may not have thoroughly considered the possible danger of launching the *Challenger* on an unusually cold day.

Seventeen years later, NASA faced a very similar situation. The official report on the 2003 *Columbia* space shuttle disaster, released by the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB), raised the fact that information about potential shuttle damage caused by *Columbia*'s foam insulation never made it to the management level.

What doomed the Columbia and its crew, said the report, was not an inadequacy of technology or ability, but missed opportunities and a lack of leadership and open-mindedness within NASA management. The 2003 disaster was, according to the report, rooted in a flawed management culture that downplayed risk and suppressed dissent: 'We are convinced that the management practices overseeing the space shuttle program were as much a cause of the accident as the foam that struck the left wing.'

The CAIB listed 15 recommendations that NASA must comply with before the next shuttle takes off. One of the changes is a new table for the Mission Management Team! The table is designed to encourage engineers to speak up when they are concerned about a problem with the shuttle. According to a NASA spokesperson, 'We are trying to encourage people to speak what's on their mind, to bring us options, to bring us dissenting opinions.'

Esser, J.K., & Lindoerfer, J.S., 1989, 'Groupthink and the space shuttle *Challenger* accident: Toward a quantitative case analysis', *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 2, 167–77.

Stroebe and Diehl considered various possible explanations for this finding. They hypothesized that 'process loss' in brainstorming groups is due to an informal coordination rule of such groups which specifies that only one group member may speak at a time. During this time, other group members have to keep silent, and they may be distracted by the content of the group discussion, or forget their own ideas. Stroebe and Diehl termed this phenomenon 'production blocking', because the waiting time before speaking and the distracting influence of others' ideas could potentially block individuals from coming up with their own ideas.

Stroebe and Diehl tested their hypothesis by creating five different conditions. In one condition, participants brainstormed in real interacting four-person groups ('interactive group' condition). Participants in four other conditions were physically separated from one another in different cubicles. Even though participants in these conditions were seated alone, they expressed their ideas via a clip-on microphone so that they could be tape-recorded. In an 'alone, individual, no communication' condition participants brainstormed individually. In the three remaining 'alone' conditions, each cubicle contained an intercom and a display with

lights, each light representing one specific group member. These lights functioned like a set of traffic lights. As soon as one member of the four-person group started to speak, a voice-activated sensor switched her light to green in all of the other three cubicles. Meanwhile the other three lights on the display were red. Each individual could only speak when his or her light was green, and all the other lights were red. This technology allowed the researchers to create three different 'alone' conditions. In the 'alone, blocking, communication' condition participants took their turns following the lights, and were able to hear via the earphones what was being said by the other participants. In the 'alone, blocking, no communication' condition participants also had to wait for their turn before expressing their ideas, but could not hear each other's ideas via the intercom. In the 'alone, no blocking, no communication' condition participants were instructed to disregard the lights and the intercom and to express their ideas whenever they wanted to.

To compare the productivity of participants working under these different conditions afterwards, Diehl and Stroebe pooled the ideas expressed by the four individuals who brainstormed

alone and without communication, to make a 'nominal group' product. Since the same idea might be suggested several times by four people working alone, without communication, whereas such repetition would not be allowed in case of free communication, redundant ideas were eliminated from the pooled set of ideas that constituted the 'nominal group' product.

The results of this clever study were clear-cut. Participants generated approximately twice as many ideas when they were allowed to express their ideas as they occurred (i.e. in the two non-blocking conditions) than when they had to wait their turn (i.e. in the three blocking conditions). These results suggest that 'production blocking' is indeed an important factor explaining the inferiority of interactive brainstorming groups. This suggests that it may be more effective to ask group members to develop their ideas separately, and only then have these ideas expressed, discussed and evaluated in a subsequent joint meeting (see Delbecq, van de Ven & Gustafson, 1975).

Of interest, electronic brainstorming (via computers linked on a network) can be very effective, because the lack of face-to-face interaction minimizes production blocking (Valachich, Dennis & Connolly, 1994).



**Figure 18.15**

In a crowd, individuals will often identify very strongly with the group and adhere very closely to group norms.

## INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Through the study of intergroup relations – how people in one group (the 'ingroup') think about and act towards members of another group (the 'outgroup') – social psychologists (e.g. Brewer & Brown, 1998; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002) seek to understand a range of critical issues, including:

■ crowd behaviour;
■ cooperation and competition between groups;
■ social identity;
■ prejudice and discrimination; and
■ how to replace social conflict with social harmony.

## DEINDIVIDUATION, COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOUR AND THE CROWD

Many researchers have emphasized the tendency of group members to act in unison, like a single entity. Early writers on crowd behaviour (who were not trained social psychologists) tended to view collective behaviour as irrational, aggressive, antisocial and primitive – reflecting the emergence of a 'group mind' in collective/crowd situations (e.g. LeBon 1896/1908). The general model is that people in interactive groups such as crowds are anonymous and distracted, which causes them to lose their sense of individuality and become deindividuated.

*Deindividuation* is thought to prevent people from

**deindividuation** a psychological state in which rational control and adherence to norms is weakened, leading to greater readiness to respond in an extreme manner and to violate social norms

following the prosocial norms of society that usually govern behaviour, because they are no longer identifiable (and hence no longer feel compelled to conform to social norms). It is argued that people regress to a primitive, selfish and uncivilized behavioural level. Research that has manipulated anonymity by placing people in dark rooms, or having them wear hoods and robes reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan, has generally found that deindividuation does increase aggression and antisocial behaviour (Zimbardo, 1970). On the other hand, when participants were deindividuated by wearing nursing uniforms, anonymity produced more prosocial behaviour (Johnson & Downing, 1979).

More recent research has discarded the idea that crowds are irrational, and has concentrated instead on understanding how people in crowds develop a shared identity, a shared purpose and shared norms (Turner & Killian, 1972). In crowd situations, people often identify very strongly with the group defined by the crowd, and therefore adhere very closely to the norms of the crowd (Reicher, 2001). Crowds may only appear irrational and fickle from the outside – more often than not, their behaviour seems rational to members of the crowd, who may also identify specific other groups (e.g. the police, ethnic/racial groups) as a legitimate target for aggression.

## COOPERATION AND COMPETITION BETWEEN GROUPS

Sherif (1966; Sherif et al., 1961; Sherif, White, & Harvey, 1955) provided a far-reaching and influential perspective on intergroup behaviour. In a series of naturalistic field experiments on conflict and cooperation at boys' camps in the United States in the early 1950s, Sherif and colleagues studied group formation, intergroup competition and conflict reduction.

In the group-formation phase, Sherif divided new arrivals at the camps into two groups and isolated them in separate living

quarters to allow them to develop their own internal structures and norms.

In the intergroup competition phase, Sherif then brought the two groups together for a series of zero-sum competitions (what one group won, the other group lost), such as tug-of-war. The typical finding at this stage was 'ingroup favouritism' – each group judged fellow ingroup members' performance to be superior to that of outgroup members (see figure 18.16).

Of especial note, the competitiveness of the between-group interactions subsequently pervaded all aspects of intergroup behaviour, becoming so extreme and conflictual (e.g. involving negative stereotyping of, and aggression towards, the outgroup) that most of Sherif's studies had to be concluded at this stage. In a replication conducted in the Lebanon, the study had to be stopped because members of one group came out with knives to attack the other group (Diab, 1970).

Having found it so easy to trigger intergroup hostility, in the conflict reduction phase Sherif discovered how hard it was to reduce conflict. The most effective strategy was to introduce a series of *superordinate goals*, i.e. goals that both groups desired but could only attain if they acted together. For example, when the camp truck broke down delivering supplies, neither group could push-start it on their own; but both groups working together managed to move the truck by pulling on a rope attached to the front bumper. As figure 18.17 shows, negative stereotypes of the outgroup which resulted after a period of intergroup competition were considerably less negative after the manipulation of superordinate goals.
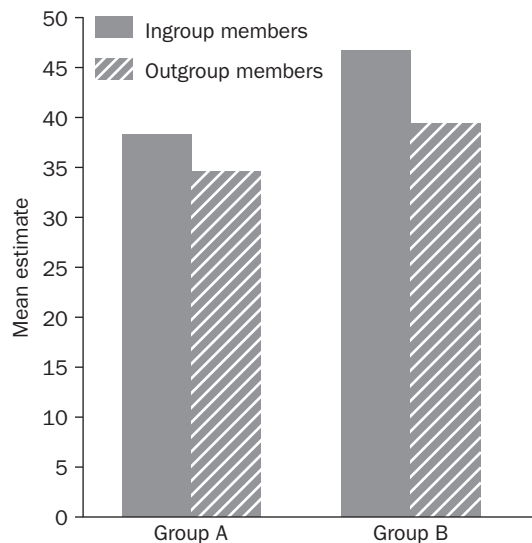
**superordinate goals** a goal desired by two or more groups, but which can only be achieved by the groups acting together, not by any single group acting on its own



**Figure 18.17**

Impact of competition vs. superordinate goals on negative stereotypes of the outgroup. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), from Sherif et al. (1961).



**Figure 18.16**

Ingroup favouritism in estimates of performance by other ingroup and outgroup members during intergroup competition. Source: Hewstone and Stroebe (2001), from Sherif et al. (1961).
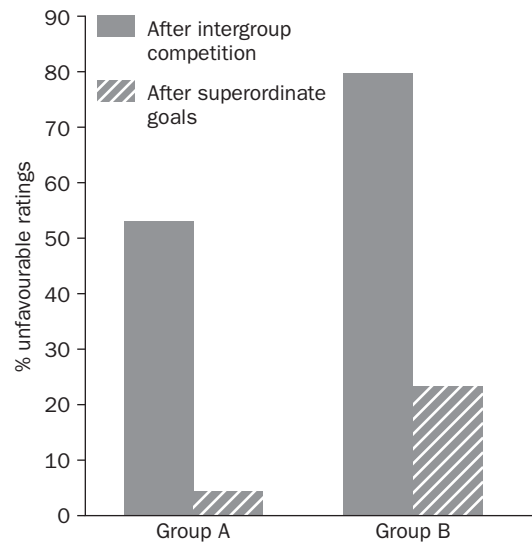
To explain his findings, Sherif focused on the importance of goals. Mutually exclusive goals cause competitive intergroup behaviour, and superordinate goals improve intergroup relations. As he pointed to the real nature of goal relations determinining intergroup behaviour, Sherif's theory is often called *realistic conflict theory*.

But Sherif's studies also found that first expressions of ingroup favouritism occurred in the group formation phase, when the groups were isolated from one another and knew only of each other's existence. So the mere existence of two groups seemed to trigger intergroup behaviour, before any mutually exclusive goals had been introduced.

**realistic conflict theory** Sherif's theory of intergroup conflict, which proposes that goal relations (e.g. competition vs. cooperation) determine the nature of intergroup relations (e.g. conflict vs. harmony)

## SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

Experiments by Tajfel and colleagues provided the most convincing evidence that competitive goals are not a necessary condition for intergroup conflict. In fact, merely being categorized as a group member can cause negative intergroup behaviour (Tajfel, Flament, Billig & Bundy, 1971). In Tajfel's studies, participants were randomly divided into two groups and asked to distribute points or money between anonymous members of their own group and anonymous members of the other group. There was no personal interaction, group members were anonymous, and the groups had no 'past' and no 'future' – for these reasons these groups are called 'minimal groups', and this experimental

**minimal group paradigm** an experimental procedure designed to investigate the isolated effect of social categorization on intergroup behaviour

procedure is called the *minimal group paradigm*.

The consistent finding of this research is that the mere fact of being categorized is enough to cause people to discriminate in favour of the ingroup and against the outgroup.

This research spawned the 'social identity perspective' on group processes and intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988). According to this perspective, the groups that we belong to define who we are. Part of our identity and how we feel about ourselves is derived from the groups we belong to, and how we evaluate them. When we categorize ourselves and others in groups, we stereotype ourselves and outgroup members in terms of our respective group memberships, and our own group identity helps to determine our attitudes, feelings and behaviours. This process produces a sense of group identification and belonging, as well as ingroup solidarity, conformity and bias.

According to this social identity perspective, because groups define and evaluate who we are, intergroup relations are a continual struggle to gain superiority for the ingroup over the outgroup. How the struggle is conducted – and the specific nature of intergroup behaviour (e.g. competitive, conflictual, destructively aggressive) – is thought to depend on people's beliefs about the status relations between groups. Are status relations between groups stable or unstable, legitimate or illegitimate? And is it possible to pass from one group to another (see Tajfel, 1978)?

## PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Some of the most negative forms of intergroup behaviour are demonstrations of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice refers to a derogatory attitude towards a group and its members, whereas discrimination refers to negative behaviour. The two are often closely interconnected.

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### *Pioneer*

**Henri Tajfel** (1919–82) was born in Wloclawek, Poland. He escaped from the Nazis to join the French army and owed his life to being captured in this uniform – it meant that he was treated as a (French) prisoner of war, rather than being sent to the death camps as a Polish Jew. This experience taught him the impact of social categorization. He came to the UK and studied at Birkbeck College, then taught at Oxford University before becoming the first Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Bristol. It was here that the first minimal group experiments were carried out, which showed that mere social categorization could affect intergroup behaviour. These studies stimulated the development of social identity theory, the most significant influence of European social psychology on the discipline as a whole.

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### *Prejudiced personalities*

Some theories of prejudice focus on personality, arguing that there are certain personality types that predispose people to intolerance and prejudice. The best known of these theories concerns the *authoritarian personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950). According to this view, harsh family rearing strategies produce a love–hate conflict in children's feelings towards their parents. The conflict is resolved by idolizing all power figures, despising weaker others and striving for a rigidly unchanging and hierarchical world order. People with this personality syndrome are predisposed to be prejudiced.

**authoritarian personality** a particular type of personality (originating in childhood and oversubmissive to authority figures) that predisposes individuals to be prejudiced

This 'personality' approach has now been largely discredited, partly because it underestimates the importance of current situations in shaping people's attitudes, and partly because it cannot explain sudden rises or falls in prejudice against specific racial groups (Brown, 1995). On the other hand, a fairly small number of people do hold generalized negative attitudes towards all outgroups (e.g. the stereotypical bigot who dislikes blacks, Asians, gays and communists), and authoritarianism is indeed associated with various forms of prejudice (Altemeyer, 1988).

### *Society and identity*

Contrary to personality explanations, by far the best predictor of prejudice is the existence of a culture of prejudice legitimized by societal norms. For example, Pettigrew (1958) measured authoritarianism and racist attitudes among whites in South Africa, the northern United States and the southern United States. He found more racist attitudes in South Africa and the southern United States than in the northern United States, but he found no differences in authoritarianism between these two groups.

How do such prejudiced 'cultures' arise? Both social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and social dominance theory (Pratto, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) may provide part of the answer.

According to social identity theory, group members strive to promote a favourable identity for their group. They do this by maximizing their group's real status advantage over other groups, and by developing belief systems that justify and legitimize their superiority. Group members achieve or maintain a positive social identity by differentiating their group from outgroups.

From the perspective of social dominance theory, people also differ in their social dominance orientation (SDO) – the extent to which they desire their own group to be dominant and superior to outgroups. According to this framework, people who have a high SDO are likely to be more prejudiced (Pratto, 1999).

### *Modern forms of prejudice*

Prejudiced attitudes are often deeply entrenched, may be passed from parents to children and are supported by the views of

significant others. Yet societal norms for acceptable behaviour can and do change, sometimes creating a conflict between personal feelings and how they can be expressed.

For example, modern liberal norms and legislation in the United States stand against prejudice, and yet centuries of history have entrenched racist attitudes in US society. Researchers suggest that, rather than abolishing prejudice, this dynamic transforms overt 'redneck' prejudice into more 'modern' forms (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986). Modern prejudice often presents itself as denial of the claim that minorities are disadvantaged, opposition to special measures to rectify disadvantage, and systematic avoidance of minorities and the entire question of prejudice against these minorities.

New, more subtle measures are required to detect these modern forms of prejudice (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). For example, increasing use is being made of implicit measures (see chapter 17), which are beyond the intentional control of the individual, and so can detect prejudice even when people are aware of societal norms regarding tolerance or political correctness (see Cunningham, Preacher & Banaji, 2001). Research using the 'Implicit Association Test' (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) has shown that white Americans have relatively strong automatic negative associations with African Americans, but positive associations with whites (they respond faster to pairings of white faces with 'good' words and black faces with 'bad' words, than to pairings of white faces wth 'bad' words and black faces with 'good' words).

## BUILDING SOCIAL HARMONY

Prejudice and conflict are significant social ills that produce enormous human suffering, ranging from damaged self-esteem, reduced opportunities, stigma and socio-economic disadvantage, all the way to intergroup violence, war and genocide (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998; Hewstone & Cairns, 2001).

Prejudice can be attacked by public service propaganda and educational campaigns, which convey societal disapproval of prejudice and may overcome some of the anxiety and fear that fuel it. But the problem with these strategies is that the very people being targeted may choose not to attend to the new information. Two prominent social-psychological approaches to building social harmony avoid this problem by promoting increased positive intergroup contact and changing the nature of social categorization (Hewstone, 1996).

### Intergroup contact

**contact hypothesis** the idea that contact between members of different groups, under specified conditions, reduces prejudice and hostility

There is now extensive evidence for the *contact hypothesis*, which states that contact between members of different groups, under appropriate conditions, can improve intergroup relations (G.W. Allport, 1954; see Pettigrew, 1998, for a recent review). Favourable conditions include cooperative

contact between equal-status members of the two groups in a situation that allows them to get to know each other on more than a superficial basis, and with the support of relevant social groups and authorities.

Contact appears to work best by reducing 'intergroup anxiety' about meeting members of the other group (Voci & Hewstone, 2003) and by promoting positive intergroup orientations, such as empathy and perspective taking (Batson et al., 1997).

One difficulty is that, even if they do come to view some individuals from the other group more positively, participants in such studies do not necessarily generalize their positive perceptions beyond the specific contact situation or contact partners with whom they have engaged, to the group as a whole (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Recent work supports the idea that clear group affiliations should be maintained in contact situations, and that participating members should be seen as being (at least to some extent) typical of their groups (Brown & Hewstone, in press). Only under these circumstances does it appear that cooperative contact is likely to lead to more positive ratings of the outgroup as a whole.

A further limitation is that optimal intergroup contact may be hard to bring about on a large scale. Wright and colleagues therefore proposed an 'extended contact effect', in which knowledge that a fellow ingroup member has a close relationship with an outgroup member is used as a catalyst to promote more positive intergroup attitudes (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe & Ropp, 1997). This extended contact is therefore second-hand, rather than involving the participants in direct intergroup contact themselves, and so could potentially bring about widespread reductions in prejudice without everyone having to develop outgroup friendships (which anyway may be impracticable, depending on the nature of the groups).

Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns and Voci (2004) have recently shown that, by reducing intergroup anxiety, both direct and extended forms of contact contribute towards more positive views of the outgroup among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

### Decategorization and recategorization

Prejudice depends on ingroup–outgroup categorizations. So if the categorization disappears, then so should the prejudice. Is this the case, and are these kinds of interventions practical?

There are various ways in which dissolution of categories might occur, two of the most prominent being:

1. decategorization, where people from different groups come to view each other as individuals (Brewer & Miller, 1984); and
2. recategorization, where people from different subgroups, such as Scots and English, come to view each other as members of a single superordinate group, such as British (see Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993).

Decategorization can be difficult to achieve when groups are very obviously different (e.g. Muslim girls and women who wear headscarves, compared with non-Muslims who typically do not), and where feelings run high it can be almost impossible to

## Changing prejudice through intergroup contact

### The research issue

In the first of three experiments on intergroup contact, Wilder considered what form of contact is required to improve attitudes towards, and stereotypes about, an outgroup.

Wilder highlighted a problem with stereotyping. When an outgroup member behaves in a negative way during intergroup contact, the effect is simply to reinforce existing negative expectations about the outgroup as a whole. And yet when an outgroup member behaves in such a way as to disconfirm the stereotype, people holding the stereotyped view often react, not by changing their view of the outgroup as a whole, but by considering the positive outgroup member as 'the exception to the rule'.

In order to overcome this tendency, Wilder suggested that intergroup contact should involve members of the outgroup who are clearly perceived to be 'typical' of that group. Only then will positive contact with those few members 'generalize' to a new, more positive view of the outgroup as a whole.

### Design and procedure

Participants were 62 female students from two rival colleges. A quasi-experimental design capitalized on one pre-existing factor and manipulated the two remaining factors between subjects:

- college identity of the outgroup member (Douglass College/Rutgers College);
- behaviour of the outgroup member ('positive'/'negative'); and
- typicality of the outgroup member ('typical'/'atypical').

Participants were randomly assigned to one level of each of the latter two independent variables. Participants always experienced contact with a single member of the outgroup (in fact, a conferate of the experimenter). Data were later collapsed across college affiliation since this factor was shown to be non-significant in the data analysis. There was also a control condition, which involved neither contact nor presence of an outgroup member. Each experimental pair (one naïve participant and the confederate) met briefly as students from the two rival colleges. During this phase information was exchanged, and the confederate presented herself as either typical or atypical of the outgroup by means of her dress and what she said. They then completed a set of problem-solving tasks in separate booths and compared their responses by exchanging answer sheets between the booths. The confederate's answers and comments on this task were used to manipulate the second factor, pleasant vs unpleasant contact.

### Results and implications

Before analysing the main data, Wilder verified that he had successfully manipulated both typicality and pleasantness of contact. Wilder analysed two main measures. The first were evaluations of the outgroup college (attitudes) – e.g. the rated quality of education at each college (from poor to excellent). The second were beliefs about characteristics of the outgroup (stereotypes) – e.g. ratings of the other college's students as conservative–liberal and studious–frivolous.

There was evidence that evaluation of the outgroup was most positive in the 'typical' member/'pleasant' contact condition. This rating was significantly different from the control condition (see figure 18.18). There was, however, almost no evidence that the contact manipulations affected participants' stereotypes. So it seems that beliefs about the outgroup are harder to change than evaluations of the outgroup.

Wilder's results gave broad support to his main hypotheses, and were crucial in highlighting the importance of typicality in intergroup contact. But a limitation of the main study is that there was no actual contact between group members: instead, they simply passed information on answer sheets between their separate booths. In this way, interpersonal interaction was carefully controlled in the study, but perhaps participants never felt they had really 'seen' enough of the other group member to warrant changing their stereotypes.

Wilder, D.A., 1984, 'Intergroup contact: The typical member and the exception to the rule', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 20, 177–94.
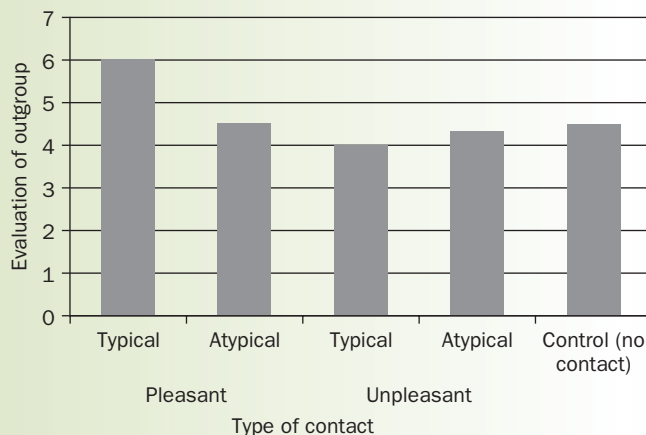


**Figure 18.18**

Generalization of pleasant vs. unpleasant contact with a typical outgroup member. Source: Wilder (1984).

prevent intergroup categorizations from coming to the fore. Recategorization may be more attainable, but it can still be difficult to get people from opposing groups with a history of antipathy and conflict to regard themselves as members of one superordinate group. (This is part of the problem in Northern Ireland, for example.) Recategorization can also pose a threat to social identity at the subgroup level, because people do not want to abandon their cherished subgroup identities for more general (and less distinctive) superordinate identities.

A more successful strategy may be a combination of a super-ordinate identity and distinctive subgroup identities, so that each group preserves its distinctive subgroup identity within a common, superordinate identity (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). A nice example is the Barbarians invitation rugby team, which regularly plays matches against visiting international teams to the UK. They all wear the same famous blue-and-white hooped shirts, but they each wear the socks of their club team. So subgroup (club) identities are effectively viewed as complementary and valued roles within a larger, superordinate identity – the Barbarians.

At the societal level this notion relates to the social policy of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism, in which group differences are recognized and nurtured within a common superordinate identity that stresses cooperative interdependence and diversity. This notion has been especially cultivated in some societies and countries, especially 'immigrant countries' such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Clearly, our behaviour is influenced in complex ways by other people and the groups to which they belong. Sometimes the presence of other people can improve our performance and judgement, but sometimes their presence worsens it. Sometimes other people can encourage us to intervene and help others; sometimes they inhibit us. The outcome depends on a complex weighing up of 'costs' and 'benefits' of intervening vs. not intervening. And sometimes they can make us behave in ways of which we would never have thought ourselves capable.

The social support of others can, then, be a source of physical and psychological strength. It can help us to resist pressures to conform to group norms, or give us the moral courage to disobey orders from an authority figure. But the social categorization that is a common consequence of group membership can also be a source of prejudice and conflict. The role of psychological research can here serve a very important professional and public role: by understanding the underlying processes, social psychology can contribute towards greater societal harmony by reducing prejudice and conflict.

# Summary

- There is a wide range of evidence regarding the effects of other people on social behaviour.
- We have highlighted some of the key theories in interpersonal relations, group processes and intergroup relations, and we have summarized the methods and findings of some of the most important studies.
- Generally, performing a task in the presence of other people improves performance on easy tasks, but impairs performance on difficult tasks.
- People are more likely to help if they are on their own, or with friends. The presence of multiple bystanders inhibits intervention because responsibility is diffused and the costs of not helping are reduced.
- People are especially likely to obey orders from a legitimate authority figure, and when others are obedient.
- We are motivated to seek the company of others to compare ourselves with them, reduce anxiety and acquire new information from them. Social support from others provides a 'buffer' against stress.
- Close interpersonal relationships can be analysed in terms of social exchange of goods, love, information and so on. Happy close relationships are characterized by high intimacy, whereas distressed relationships tend to involve reciprocation of negative behaviour.
- We join social groups for multiple reasons, and frequently define ourselves, in part, as group members. This social identity develops over a series of stages, in which we are socialized into groups.
- Groups are typically structured into roles, of which the distinction between leader and followers is central. Group influence is affected by norms, and both majorities and minorities within groups can exert influence, albeit in different ways.
- Performance of groups is often worse than performance of individuals, because potential gains in effectiveness are offset by social loafing and poor decision making. Decisions made in groups tend to be more extreme than individual decisions, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Individuals are also less creative in groups, because their ideas are blocked by those of other group members.

- In larger groups we may find ourselves influenced by other members of a crowd, due to shared norms and a shared identity, but crowds are not necessarily irrational.
- Behaviour between members of different groups may be competitive, especially where goals are incompatible, but ingroup favouritism can be triggered by the mere existence of two groups, and the development of social identity as a group member.
- Excesses of intergroup behaviour are revealed in prejudice and discrimination, which sometimes take subtle forms in contemporary society. Prejudice and discrimination may be partly determined by personality, but have more to do with group norms, and the desire to achieve or maintain a positive social identity and dominate other groups.
- Social psychology contributes positively to society by promoting social harmony. Positive, cooperative contact between members of different groups reduces anxiety and can generalize beyond the contact situation, while ingroup–outgroup categorizations can be altered in various ways to decrease the importance of group memberships, promote shared identities, and recognize group differences in a positive way.

# REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the presence of other people tend to improve performance on easy, well-learned tasks, but worsen it on difficult, poorly learned tasks?
2. What processes explain bystander apathy in the presence of other people?
3. What are some of the main types of coordination losses and motivation losses in group performance, and how could they be overcome?
4. Discuss the role of norms within groups, and explain how they develop and change.
5. Are competitive goals necessary or sufficient conditions for creating intergroup conflict?
6. What kinds of intergroup contact can promote prejudice reduction, and how?

## FURTHER READING

Baron, R.S., & Kerr, N.L. (2002). *Group Process, Group Decision, Group Action*. 2nd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.
An excellent review of key theories and studies in the area of group performance and decision making.

Bierhoff, H-W. (2002). *Prosocial Behaviour*. Hove: Psychology Press.
Includes detailed coverage of the main theories of, and processes underlying, prosocial behaviour and their applications.

Brewer, M.B. (2003). *Intergroup Relations*. 2nd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.
A clear account of phenomena relating to intergroup conflict and its resolution.

Brown, R.J. (1995). *Prejudice: Its Social Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Thorough and readable overview of the foundations of prejudice and how to reduce it.

Fletcher, G. (2002). *The New Science of Intimate Relationships*. Oxford: Blackwell.
An authoritative survey including major theories of relationships and the processes involved in the development of intimate relationships.

Turner, J.C. (1991). *Social Influence*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
An integrative account of majority/minority influence and group polarization from the perspective of self-categorization theory.

Contributing authors:
Miles Hewstone and Michael Hogg