KEY KNOWLEDGE

- the role of person perception, attributions, attitudes and stereotypes in interpreting, analysing, remembering and using information about the social world
- the applications and limitations of the tri-component model of attitudes
- attitudes and stereotypes that may lead to prejudice and discrimination.

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We communicate with and interact with others on a number of different levels in everyday life. Our interactions may range from the intimacy of a close personal relationship through to the more impersonal and formal interactions with people we know less well. The way in which we relate to another person depends, to a large extent, on the type of relationship we have with them. Our interactions with strangers will differ from the way we interact with people we know and like, and these interactions will be different again from those with people we know well, but don’t like.

As we interact with others, we often try to understand the thoughts, feelings, motives and other influences that may explain why they are behaving in a particular way. When we do this, we tend to draw conclusions about them, often without even knowing them. For example, we may decide whether we like or dislike them, whether we can trust or not trust them, whether they have acted appropriately or inappropriately, whether they have done something poorly or well, whether or not we want to work with them again, and whether or not we want to see them again. The mental processes involved are part of social cognition.

Social cognition is concerned with how we make sense of our social world. More specifically, social cognition involves how we interpret, analyse, remember and use information to make judgments about others in different social situations. Social cognition usually serves us well and we get better at understanding others as our cognitive abilities develop and we learn through experience. But it is not an error-free process. For example, we can decide to trust someone who shouldn’t have been trusted, and someone who first impressed as likeable can turn out to be unlikeable. Some mistakes in judgment are harmless. Other mistakes can have significant consequences; for example, when a friend trusted with an intimate secret reveals it to the ‘last person’ you would ever want to know or when an elderly person is exploited by an unscrupulous financial adviser who was trusted with their life savings.

There are many aspects of social cognition. In this chapter we consider how we form impressions of other people (person perception), how we go about explaining the behaviour of other people (attributions) and how we form attitudes towards people, particularly attitudes and stereotypes that may lead to prejudice and discrimination.
PERSON PERCEPTION — FORMING IMPRESSIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE

Consider the thoughts that pass through your mind when you first meet someone, or even when someone walking by catches your attention. Most likely, you form a quick impression based on a ‘snapshot’ of information. This could include judgments such as this person seems attractive, or someone you would like to know better, or someone who could not be trusted, or someone who is likely to be aggressive. The judgments you make when forming your impression demonstrate person perception.

*Person perception* refers to the mental processes we use to form impressions and draw conclusions about the personal characteristics of other people. Making judgments about others, whether they be friends, family or strangers, is a common and vital part of our life as social beings. These judgments, including first impressions, guide the various types of relationships we develop with others. For example, an impression that someone is helpful might encourage you to approach that person rather than someone else for directions. An impression that someone is careless might lead you to avoid lending something that is of sentimental value to you. Similarly, general positive or negative impressions of others – our liking or not liking them – influence our choices of companions to spend time with or share personal thoughts and feelings with and, ultimately, influence the close relationships we form (Smith & Mackie, 2000).

Understanding other people depends on accurate information on which to base our judgments, but this is not always available. Sometimes there is little or no information. Sometimes the information is misleading or is shaped by our personal biases and expectations. Sometimes the situation in which we form the judgment dominates other information. Each of these can influence the accuracy of the understanding we achieve (Gilovich, *et al.*, 2013).

Psychologists have been particularly interested in factors that influence our impressions when we first meet someone, or even when we see someone in passing. Since we cannot actually see anyone’s personality traits, values, mental state, motivations, intentions and so on, perceptions of other people begin with visible cues. First impressions are primarily based on the way people look and the way they act. These cues are informative only because we believe that appearance and behaviour reflect personal characteristics, even when we know that we have observed only samples of behaviour (Kassin, *et al.*, 2008; Smith & Mackie, 2000).

**FIGURE 9.2** First impressions are primarily based on the way people look and the way they act.
Impressions from physical appearance

Physical appearance is an important characteristic of first impressions, especially attractiveness. Many research studies have found that people we judge as physically attractive are generally perceived as more interesting, warm, mentally healthy, intelligent, independent, outgoing and socially skilled than unattractive people. In addition, good-looking people are more likely to be perceived as less lonely, less socially anxious and more popular (Aronson, 2011; Feingold, 1992).

Individuals who are physically attractive benefit from the halo effect. The halo effect is a cognitive bias in which the impression we form about one quality of a person influences our beliefs and expectations about the person in other qualities. For example, in relation to person perception, it is assumed that positive qualities ‘go together’, as do negative qualities. So, if a person is good looking, then they will also have good personal qualities. If we judge someone as beautiful rather than ugly, we are also likely to rate that person as nice rather than mean, friendly rather than unfriendly, cheerful rather than sad, and so on. We transfer our judgment from one visible characteristic to others that cannot be seen or are unknown (Aronson, 2011).

Researchers have found a halo effect for physical attractiveness across a wide variety of situations when people have minimal information about each other. For example, physical attractiveness is a reliable predictor of whether we want to date someone. Strangers are more likely to stop and give help to a physically attractive person than to someone who is less attractive. More attractive people tend to be given higher salaries than less attractive people with the same qualifications. Judges can be more lenient with more attractive defendants when hearing bail applications and giving sentences for minor offences (but not serious crimes). Adults and adolescents are more likely to give an attractive person the ‘benefit of the doubt’ over a wrongdoing than they will for an unattractive person (Aronson, 2011).

The actual pattern of someone’s facial features can affect the first impression. For example, studies have found that adult males with ‘baby-faced’ features—large, round eyes, a large forehead, high eyebrows and a rounded, relatively small chin—tend to be perceived as more naive, honest and kind compared to adult males with a more mature facial appearance. In addition, because of these perceptions, they also tend to be judged as being weak and submissive, so are less likely to be recommended for jobs that require characteristics found in a ‘mature’ person, such as leadership skills and wisdom (Gilovich, et al., 2013; Smith & Mackie, 2000).

Impressions from non-verbal communication

Our impression of people is also influenced by the information they convey through the silent language of non-verbal communication. For example, we often communicate inner aspects of ourselves through facial expressions, eye gaze, posture, gestures and other bodily movements—what is commonly called body language.

A person’s body language is an expression of behaviour that enables us to make quick and often accurate judgments about them. There are also shared understandings of what many of these expressive behaviours mean. For example, in Australia and other Western cultures, tapping our fingers when waiting shows impatience, winking an eye at someone demonstrates familiarity, raising an eyebrow indicates disbelief or concern and scratching our head suggests we are puzzled.

Specific actions are also combined to form an overall pattern from which we form impressions. For example, we tend to form a positive impression of someone who orients their body towards us—when they are facing us directly, leaning towards us and nodding while we speak. In addition, we are likely to judge the person who adopts this type of posture as likeable and to perceive their actions as evidence that they like us. Some people, however, are better at interpreting (‘reading’) body language than others and there are cultural differences. For example, holding up a raised thumb can be a greeting in one culture and an insult in another culture. Similarly, in many Middle Eastern cultures the left hand is reserved for bodily hygiene and is therefore not used for a handshake greeting as is done in Western cultures.
Eye contact

Eye contact is one of the most influential forms of non-verbal communication. People from Western cultures tend to seek eye contact when they speak to someone. They will often follow a person’s gaze as they move their eyes in various directions. If the other person establishes eye contact it will tend to be perceived as a sign of interest and attention, just as breaking eye contact and looking somewhere else is an indication that you are not interested in what is being said. If the person avoids eye contact it may be judged that they are unfriendly, shy, embarrassed, ashamed, shifty or lying.

If eye contact is maintained most of the time, it will tend to be perceived that a person is honest, straightforward, friendly and likeable. Too much eye contact, such as when staring, can be perceived as uncomfortable or unpleasant. In addition, it is often interpreted as communicating threat, anger, hostility or being unapproachable. For example, if a person is threatening another they will tend to stare directly at them and maintain the contact. Teachers sometimes use this technique when reprimanding students. Students in a bullying situation who are threatening others often stare. Therefore, making eye contact can show both friendship or a threat, depending upon the context in which it is used and other verbal and non-verbal cues that happen at the same time.

In some Asian cultures, making direct eye contact may be considered rude and confrontational. Eye contact can also be disrespectful within American indigenous cultures, especially if a child makes eye contact with an elderly person. In Muslim cultures, women may especially avoid eye contact with men because it can be perceived as a sign of sexual interest (Akechi, et al., 2013; Kassin, et al., 2008).

Facial expressions

Some facial expressions seem to be communicated and perceived in similar ways across many different cultures throughout the world, particularly facial expressions of emotion. American psychologist Paul Ekman has been the most prominent researcher in this area.

Ekman used cross-cultural studies to investigate whether facial expressions associated with certain emotions are common among all people, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. After many studies, Ekman (1980) concluded that ‘all people speak and understand the same facial language’.

In one of his best-known studies, facial expressions of disgust, fear, happiness, anger, sadness and surprise were displayed in standardised photographs and shown to people from Brazil, China, Japan, Argentina and the United States. The participants were asked to say what the person in each photograph was feeling. The results are shown in Table 9.1. Regardless of cultural background, the great majority of participants were able to identify the facial expressions associated with these emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). However, there was a potential confounding variable — participants in the study who were from non-Western cultures may have had some exposure to Western people (e.g. through personal contact or the media) and may therefore have learned to ‘read’ Western facial expressions.

In order to control this variable, Ekman and Friesen (1971) conducted a second cross-cultural study using participants from a remote part of New Guinea. These participants were from a tribe called the Fore. They were illiterate and many other aspects of their culture were comparable to life in the Stone Age. Importantly, they had almost no exposure to Westerners or to Western culture prior to the study.

The Fore participants were shown photographs of faces of Westerners like those in the photos for the previous study (see Table 9.1). They were required to respond by referring to situations in which they had experienced the same emotion. For example, the photo of a facial expression of fear suggested ‘being chased by a wild boar when you did not have a spear’ and the photo of sadness suggested ‘your child had died’.

The Fore participants accurately identified the emotions being expressed but they experienced
considerable difficulty and were generally unsuccessful in distinguishing fear from surprise. This may be because Fore people are usually fearful when taken by surprise, hence their difficulty in distinguishing between two emotions which are closely associated in their life experience.

Another group of Fore people who had not participated in the study were then asked to demonstrate the facial expressions they used to communicate the emotions of anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. These were videotaped and shown to a group of American university students. The students were able to identify emotions from the facial expressions of Fore people with considerable accuracy but, like their Fore counterparts, often confused the expressions of fear and surprise (Ekman & Friesen, 1975).

Ekman’s research indicates that facial expressions of certain basic emotions are recognised by people of different cultures. This universal recognition suggests that certain basic facial expressions may be part of our biological inheritance. Studies of children who are both blind and deaf at birth support this view. Children with these disabilities could not have learned how to communicate emotions by observing other people or hearing descriptions of facial expressions. However, their expression of basic emotions is like that of children who do not have a visual or hearing impairment. For example, happiness consists of raised mouth corners (a smile) and tightened lower eyelids, and anger is expressed with clenched fists and teeth (Goodenough, 1932). More recent studies which compared facial expressions of blind and normally sighted children have found similar results (Izard, 1971; Woodworth & Schlosberg, 1954).

### TABLE 9.1

Results of the Ekman and Friesen (1968) study show that the great majority of participants were able to identify the expressions associated with the emotions, regardless of their respective cultural backgrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Disgust</th>
<th>Surprise</th>
<th>Sadness</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99 Americans</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Brazilians</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119 Chileans</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168 Argentinians</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Japanese</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BOX 9.1**

**Personal space**

*Personal space* refers to a small, ‘invisible’, physical area immediately surrounding our body that is regarded as our personal territory. The size of our personal space varies according to factors such as our cultural background, mood, who we are with, what we are doing and where we are. Our perceptions of others can be indicated by our physical proximity to (distance from) them.

When communicating or interacting with another person(s), the distance or space we maintain between ourself and the other person(s) is called *interpersonal distance* or *interpersonal space*.

Research on interpersonal distance was first conducted by American anthropologist Edward Hall (1966). He called this area of research proxemics. Hall observed how people from different cultures throughout the world, then identified four main zones of interpersonal distance people tend to prefer in different situations. He suggested these zones indicate the types of relationships and interactions which we have with others.

**TABLE 9.2 Hall’s (1966) interpersonal distance classifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Interaction activity</th>
<th>People allowed into zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>0–0.5 metres</td>
<td>Informal talking and physical contact in private or public with someone you feel close to</td>
<td>Close family, girlfriend/boyfriend, close friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>0.5–1.5 metres</td>
<td>Informal talking and socialising in the school grounds or at a party</td>
<td>Friends, work mates and acquaintances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>1.5–3.5 metres</td>
<td>Formal or informal work or business-related activity</td>
<td>Strangers or people we do not know well or do not know at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3.5 metres and over</td>
<td>Formal presentation (for example, a lecture, speech) to a large group, such as at a school assembly or concert</td>
<td>Anyone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BOX 9.2**

**How lasting are first impressions?**

Canadian psychologist Bertram Gawronski and his colleagues (2010) investigated the persistence of first impressions and conditions under which they might change.

The participants were 164 university students (118 women, 46 men). They were shown either positive or negative information about an unknown individual on a computer screen. Then, participants were presented with new information about the same individual, which was inconsistent with the initial information. To study the influence of contexts, the researchers subtly changed the background colour of the computer screen while participants formed an impression of the target person.

When the researchers subsequently measured participants’ spontaneous reactions to an image of the target person, they found the new information influenced participants’ reactions only when the person was presented against the background in which the new information had been learned. Otherwise, participants’ reactions were still dominated by the first lot of information when the target person was presented against other backgrounds.

The researchers concluded that their results support the common observation that first impressions are persistent, but they can sometimes be changed.

According to Gawronski, ‘What is necessary is for the first impression to be challenged in multiple different contexts. In that case, new experiences become decontextualized and the first impression will slowly lose its power. But, as long as a first impression is challenged only within the same context, you can do whatever you want. The first impression will dominate regardless of how often it is contradicted by new experiences.’

In addition, the researchers concluded that their results have important implications for the treatment of mental disorders. ‘If someone with phobic reactions to spiders is seeking help from a psychologist, the therapy will be much more successful if it occurs in multiple different contexts rather than just in the psychologist’s office.’

LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.1

Review questions

1. Describe the relationship between person perception and social cognition.
2. Explain why person perception is considered to be a vital part of everyday life with references to three relevant examples.
3. (a) Explain the meaning of perceptual set in relation to person perception.
   (b) Give an example of how perceptual set could distort person perception.
4. (a) Formulate a definition for ‘first impression’ in relation to person perception.
   (b) Explain how each of the following factors influence first impressions, with reference to a relevant example for each factor:
      (i) physical appearance
      (ii) halo effect
      (iii) eye contact
      (iv) facial expressions.
5. Explain how the situation (context) in which any of the factors listed in 4(b) are expressed can influence impression formation.
6. Give examples of three common gestures and describe the first impression that could be conveyed by each one. For each gesture, specify the context in which it is used.
7. (a) Explain how you could manipulate the impression you present in a job interview to convey a positive impression.
   (b) Give three examples of behavioural or physical characteristics that could contribute to a negative impression.
8. Give an example of an advertisement in which a person is prominent and explain the nature of the person perception the advertisement is attempting to convey. Ensure you describe or include a copy of (or link to) the advertisement.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.2

Reflection

Physically attractive people tend to be initially perceived in a positive way. They also benefit from the halo effect. Taking account of person perception findings, comment on whether very attractive people are more advantaged in one or more aspects of everyday life than unattractive people.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.3

Analysis of research by Ekman and Friesen (1968) on facial expressions of emotion

Consider the research on facial expressions of emotion conducted by Ekman and Friesen. Analyse the research by answering the following questions.

1. (a) What is a cross-cultural study?
   (b) Why did the researchers conduct cross-cultural studies to investigate facial expressions?
2. The left column (Culture) in table 9.1 on page 357 shows a different number of participants for each cultural group in the sample. Does this bias the results in any way?
3. Suggest a relevant research hypothesis for the study.
4. Identify the operationalised IV and DVs.
5. Why were the researchers concerned about the presence of a possible confounding variable?
6. How was this variable controlled in the next study?
7. (a) What descriptive statistic procedure could be used to support comparison of the results with those of the meta analysis results in figure 9.5 on page 357?
   (b) Comment on the similarities and/or differences between the results shown in table 9.1 and figure 9.5.
8. What evidence suggests that facial expressions of emotion have a significant genetic component?
ATTRIBUTION — EXPLAINING BEHAVIOUR

Why do we fall in love with some people but not others? Why did that girl get so drunk at the party? Why was that boy so rude to the bus driver this morning? Why do some people succeed and others fail? Why do some people laugh when others cry? Why do some people help or hurt others? To make sense of our social world, we try to understand the causes of other people’s behaviour. We look for reasons and explanations to help our understanding. But what kinds of explanations do we make and how do we come up with them?

Attribution is the process by which people explain the causes of their own and other people’s behaviour. The term is also used to refer to the explanation we come up with. Our explanations can be grouped into two categories — personal and situational.

A personal attribution, sometimes called dispositional, is an explanation due to the characteristics of the person involved, such as their personality, ability, attitude, motivation, mood or effort. These are internal factors that are sourced within the person. If we attribute behaviour to internal factors, we tend to blame the person for causing the behaviour. For example, if we hear that Mario has lost his job because he failed to let his team leader know that he was not going to work for a week, we may think it was typical as he was always unreliable and irresponsible. We are attributing his behaviour to personal factors.

If, however, we learn that this behaviour occurred because his mother was seriously ill in hospital and he was therefore too preoccupied with her wellbeing and feeling too stressed, we are giving a situational attribution. A situational attribution is an explanation due to factors external to the person involved, such as the actions of another person, some aspect of the environment, the task, luck and fate.

Our explanations are often reasonable and accurate, but we are vulnerable to bias. Researchers have identified three general biases that often affect our attributions: the fundamental attribution error, actor–observer bias and self-serving bias.

FIGURE 9.6 Some spectators will attribute this player’s injury to courage (a personal attribution); others attribute it to some aspect of the sport or match (a situational attribution).
The fundamental attribution error

If you see a new student arguing with a teacher in the school yard at lunchtime, you might conclude that the student is rebellious, argumentative and/or rude. You might not consider that something in the situation, such as being blamed for rubbish that someone else dropped, caused the behaviour. When explaining the behaviour of others, we tend to focus on the role of factors associated with the person and underestimate the influence of the situation. This bias is so common that it is called the fundamental attribution error.

The fundamental attribution error is the tendency to overestimate the influence of personal factors and underestimate the impact of situational factors on other people’s behaviour. When we do this, we attribute a person’s behaviour to internal rather than external factors.

One explanation of why we make this error is that the person’s behaviour tends to be more conspicuous and therefore noticeable (‘salient’) than the situation in which it is occurring. This is called saliency bias. This type of bias works like figure–ground in visual perception — the person is standing out in the foreground as the figure of your attention and the situation is barely noticeable in the background.

When we focus on the person, we tend to do so with a perspective that the world is a just and fair place. The just world belief refers to the belief that the world is a just place in which people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get. This belief allows us to better understand and feel safer in a world where we do not always have control over our circumstances and can therefore be exposed to cruel twists of fate. According to the just world view, the individual believes that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people (Lerner, 1980).

This just world belief influences our perceptions of others, often in a way that leads us to blame people for their misfortunes. When something bad happens to someone, we tend to believe the victim must have done something to deserve their fate rather than believe situational factors were responsible for it. Examples include beliefs that crime victims are careless, victims of family violence provoke their attackers, people on the dole are lazy bludgers, homeless people are unmotivated, and that Aborigines deserved to be treated badly by the British colonisers.

Actor–observer bias

One exception to the fundamental attribution error occurs when it comes to explaining our own behaviour. Instead of blaming the person, we blame the situation. Actor–observer bias refers to our tendency to attribute our own behaviour to external or situational causes, yet attribute others’ behaviour to internal factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). For example, if you fail an exam you may blame your failure on an overly difficult paper, but you might say Maria failed because she did not study enough. Similarly, when someone cuts you off when driving it is attributed to their careless and reckless driving, but when you cut someone off it is because your view was blocked. And a government minister who makes the same mistake as a member of the opposition party did when in government is likely to say the blunder was unavoidable under the circumstances, rather than being due to their lack of planning or wisdom.

Actor–observer bias is sometimes called the actor–observer discrepancy because there is a mismatch between the attribution that is made when the individual is the ‘actor’ in a given situation and the attribution that is made when the same person is the ‘observer’ of someone else’s behaviour in the same situation.

Self-serving bias

Self-serving bias is evident when the teacher hands back a test and a student attributes a good result to their ability and hard work, or a bad result to situational factors such as unfair questions, the teacher marking too hard or a sick student who coughed throughout the test. It is also evident when a gambler attributes a win to skill and a loss to bad luck and when someone believes they are personally responsible for a group’s success but assigns the blame for a bad performance to the other group members.
When judging ourselves we tend to take the credit for our successes and attribute failures to situational factors. This is called **self-serving bias**. One explanation of this bias is that we are motivated by a desire to protect our self-esteem so we distance ourselves from failure. It has also been suggested that we may have a need to maintain a positive public image and therefore strive to look good to other people (Miller & Ross, 1975).

**Figure 9.8** Self-serving bias means that this person is probably explaining her accident by listing situational factors (such as sunlight glare or the other driver braking too quickly) rather than personal factors (such as carelessness or inattention).

**Culture and attribution**

People all over the world do not explain other people’s behaviour in the same way. Researchers have found differences between people in individualistic cultures (such as in Australia, North America and Western Europe) and collectivist cultures (such as in many Asian countries).

In an *individualist culture*, being an individual and independent is valued and encouraged, and achieving personal goals is considered to be more important than achieving group goals. In these cultures, it is also considered acceptable for the individual to place achievement of personal goals ahead of achieving group goals. In a *collectivist culture*, achieving group goals is considered to be more important than the achievement of individual goals, and individuals are encouraged, and sometimes expected, to place group goals ahead of their personal goals.

Members of collectivist cultures tend to be less likely to make the fundamental attribution error. They are more likely than members of individualistic cultures to attribute the causes of another person’s behaviour to external, situational factors, rather than to internal, personal factors. This is the exact opposite of the attributional bias that is demonstrated in individualistic cultures. In many Asian cultures, people tend to be more sensitive to and focus on the influence of the situation rather than the individual. This means they are less

**Figure 9.9** Many Asian countries have a collectivist culture and people tend to be more sensitive to and focus on the influence of the situation rather than the individual.
likely to overlook or minimise the role of the situation (Choi, Nisbett & Norenzayen, 1999).

In one of the best-known studies on this topic, American psychologist Joan Miller (1984) asked Hindu Indians and North Americans of varying ages to explain the cause of positive and negative everyday behaviours in terms of personal and situational factors. As shown in figure 9.10, there were no cultural differences among the 8–15-year-old children in the sample. However, with increasing age, Americans were much more inclined to explain the behaviours in terms of personal attributions and Indians made more situational attributions.

![Personal attributions and situational attributions](image)

**FIGURE 9.10** Results from Miller’s (1984) study on cultural differences in attribution


The self-serving bias is also much less common in collectivist cultures. In Japan, for example, the ideal person tends to be someone who is aware of their shortcomings and continually works to overcome them. It is not someone who thinks highly of themselves. Generally, in many Asian cultures, people tend to not define themselves predominantly in terms of their individual accomplishments, as tends to be common in Western cultures. In addition, self-esteem is not tied too much to doing better than others, and fitting in rather than standing out from the crowd is emphasised (Huffman, 2012).

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**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.4**

**Review questions**

1. Explain the meaning of attribution.
2. In what way is attribution a social cognition process?
3. Distinguish between personal and situational attributions with reference to your own example(s).
4. Name and describe three types of error or bias that can influence attribution. Give an example of each type, preferably from your own experience.
5. What is the relevance of the just world belief to attribution?
6. To what extent is the type of attribution made influenced by culture? Explain with reference to an example.

7. Identify the type of attribution, attribution error or bias that is most likely to have occurred in each of the following examples:
   (a) The P-plater blames his minor accident on a misaligned mirror rather than his inexperience or carelessness.
   (b) Jake and Trinh work as casual waiters. Jake thinks Trinh is clumsy when Trinh accidently drops a glass. When Jake does the same later on he blames it on the slippery glass.
   (c) Ally said that the new student in psychology impressed her as somewhat cold and ‘stuck up’ when she first saw her, but she turned out to be a really nice person when Ally met her at a party.
   (d) Sienna thinks that the person is begging because he’s too lazy to get a job.
   (e) Sam blames the loss of a close basketball game on bad umpiring decisions.
ATTITUDES

Is the Eureka Tower an eyesore? Should poker machines be banned? Should VCE students be allowed to leave the school grounds when they are not required to be in class? Is a one-year ‘gap’ break between VCE and tertiary studies worthwhile? Should there be an age limit to open a Facebook account? Should politicians be legally obligated to tell the truth? Do you enjoy heavy metal music? What is the best age at which to get married? Are there better ways of spending the money used to stage the opening and closing ceremonies at the Olympic Games? Should public transport be free? Should we change refugee and asylum seeker policies?

Your reactions to these questions reflect your likes and dislikes about objects, people, groups, events and issues. These reactions are what psychologists generally call attitudes.

We have intense feelings about some of our attitudes, but others are less important to us. Although some of our attitudes are not as strong as others, the attitudes we form tend to last.

Our attitudes are learned through experience. They reflect our unique experiences as individuals, as well as our socio-cultural background. As we interact with different individuals and groups, and as we are exposed to various kinds of media and life in general, we form attitudes, are influenced by them, display them to others, argue about them and sometimes change them. We are aware of many of our attitudes, but there are some of which we are unaware until we need to express them.

Attitudes can be viewed as ideas that we hold about ourselves, others, objects and experiences. A commonly used definition describes an attitude as an evaluation a person makes about an object, person, group, event or issue. This definition indicates that we can form attitudes towards anything, for example, ferris wheels and iPads (objects); ourselves and politicians (people); our friendship group and Greenpeace (groups); Easter and elections (events); and euthanasia and climate change (issues).

In defining an attitude, the term evaluation refers to a judgment being made, either positive, negative or neutral, about some specific aspect of our lives and the world in which we live. This means that attitudes involve reactions — likes and dislikes, feelings for and against, preferences and aversions, or non-involvement (where an actual response is not necessary). However, the judgment must be relatively consistent and lasting for it to be called an attitude.

**FIGURE 9.11** We form attitudes towards all kinds of objects, people, groups, events and issues. A key characteristic of an attitude is that it involves a judgment which may be positive, negative or neutral.
Tri-component model of attitudes

Psychologists have proposed various theories and models to describe and/or explain what attitudes are, how they are formed and the circumstances under which they may change. The most influential and widely used model is called the tri-component, or multi-component, model. The *tri-component model of attitudes* proposes that any attitude has three related components — the affective, behavioural and cognitive components — which are sometimes called the ‘ABCs of attitudes’.

**Affective component**

The *affective component* of an attitude refers to the emotional reactions or feelings an individual has towards an object, person, group, event or issue. Thus, it is based on a judgment which results in a positive response (such as liking or favouring), a negative response (such as disliking or hating) or a neutral response (such as lack of interest or concern). The affective component of an attitude is reflected by expressions such as ‘I enjoy chatting with friends on Skype’ (positive), ‘I hate country music’ (negative) and ‘I’m not interested in politics’ (neutral).

**Behavioural component**

The *behavioural component* of an attitude refers to the way in which an attitude is expressed through our actions (or how we might behave should the opportunity arise). For example, running to keep fit or protesting about an increase in tertiary HECS (fee) payments are actions that reflect the behavioural component of your attitudes towards fitness and the requirement to pay higher fees for university studies.

**Cognitive component**

The *cognitive component* of an attitude refers to the beliefs we have about an object, person, group, event or issue. Our beliefs are linked to what we know about the world. They develop as a result of our experience throughout the course of our lives.

Some beliefs are based on fact. For example, the belief that AIDS can be transmitted by heterosexuals as well as homosexuals is true. Other beliefs may be false. For example, it is not true that all psychologists do the same kind of work. Furthermore, some beliefs can be verified and others cannot be proven. For example, we can verify the belief about heterosexual transmission of AIDS by asking a doctor or by checking a book on AIDS. However, we cannot verify the belief that there is intelligent life in another galaxy. An attitude involving a verifiable belief is more easily changed than an attitude involving an unverifiable belief.

*FIGURE 9.12* The tri-component model of attitudes proposes that all attitudes have three related components.
Consistency between the components
Although the affective, cognitive and behavioural components of an attitude have been described separately, the tri-component model proposes that all three components must be present before it can be said that an attitude exists.

In many cases, the affective, cognitive and behavioural components are consistent. For example, you might feel good about going to school (affective component) and work hard in and out of class (behavioural component) because you believe that good grades are required to get into the tertiary course of most interest to you (cognitive component). Similarly, you might avoid a spider (behavioural component) because you are scared of spiders (affective component) and believe spiders can harm you (cognitive component).

Inconsistency between the components
Some psychologists believe that there are possibly only affective and cognitive components of attitudes because a person's behaviour does not always reflect the attitude they hold; that is, the behavioural component is often inconsistent, or 'out of sync', with the affective and cognitive components of the attitude.

For example, a person may dislike watching test cricket (affective component) because they believe it takes too long for a result (cognitive component), but they may choose to attend a match because their friends are going (behavioural component). Furthermore, a person may know that dental hygiene is important and agrees that six-monthly dental visits are vital (cognitive component), but refuses to go to the dentist (behavioural component) because the sound of a dental drill makes them feel anxious (affective component).

There are also times when the behavioural component is consistent with one other component, but these two components are inconsistent with the third component. This often results from one or more of the components being stronger, or more intense, than the other(s).

In this example, the affective and behavioural components do not correspond with the cognitive component, and the ‘head has ruled the head’. Consider also the example of a person who hates pumpkin soup (affective component) but eats it when staying at a friend's place (behavioural component) because the person believes it is the polite thing to do (cognitive component). In this case, the ‘head has ruled the heart’.

BOX 9.3
Analysis of gender prejudice using the tri-component model of attitudes
Prejudice can be directed towards young people, the elderly, females, males, the physically and intellectually disabled, people with different religious or ethnic backgrounds, people who are more or less wealthy than others and so on.

The example at right uses gender prejudice to illustrate the tri-component model of attitudes. In this example, the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of a prejudiced attitude are consistent with one another.

For example, a person may be in love with their partner (affective component), have doubts about the future of the relationship (cognitive component), but continue in the relationship (behavioural component). In this example, the affective and behavioural components do not correspond with the cognitive component, and the ‘heart has ruled the head’.

FIGURE 9.13 A person may be in love with their partner (affective component), have doubts about the future of the relationship (cognitive component), but continue in the relationship (behavioural component). In this example, the affective and behavioural components do not correspond with the cognitive component, and the ‘heart has ruled the head’.
**BOX 9.4**

**Distinguishing between attitudes, beliefs, values and opinions**

Many people use the terms value, belief and opinion interchangeably with the term attitude. There is some similarity between these terms, but there are also important differences.

**Values** are our personal judgments about how desirable, worthwhile, useful or important something is. Because values involve an evaluation of the ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ of something, they are similar to the affective component of an attitude. For a value to develop, an individual needs to have a strong conviction about the focus of the value. However, some of our attitudes do not involve such deep commitment. Justice, sincerity, compassion, bravery, loyalty and beauty are examples of values. Values generally serve as standards for decision-making through which we develop attitudes. For example, a person may hold the value of justice as being ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ and this value may be the standard for the person’s strong attitude towards capital punishment for murder.

We may have hundreds of attitudes when we are adults, but we will have fewer values. Furthermore, we tend to prioritise values according to their importance to us. For example, one person may regard loyalty and truth as most important, and cleanliness and thrift (being careful with money) as least important. For another person, the order may be reversed.

**Beliefs** are what we think to be true about ourselves, others, objects, issues and events. A belief does not necessarily have to be based on fact. It is necessary only that the individual believes something to be true; for example, a belief that astrology provides accurate descriptions of personality. Unlike a value, a belief does not involve a judgment as to whether something is good or bad. For example, an individual may hold the belief that it is not dangerous to exceed the speed limit on a freeway.

**Opinions** are points of view based on known facts, but they are disputable. Like attitudes, opinions involve a judgment, but they involve less emotional commitment than does a value or an attitude. Furthermore, opinions are more open to change than attitudes, beliefs and values, because they are not as deeply based and irrefutable evidence can lead an individual to change an opinion. For example, if someone holds the opinion that eight-year-old girls are taller than boys of the same age in Australia, then statistical evidence can be produced to show that this opinion is incorrect. However, because of their affective component, attitudes are much more difficult to change.

**PROOFS**

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**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.5**

**Review questions**

1. **(a)** Give a psychological definition of the term attitude.
   **(b)** Formulate a simpler definition without compromising accuracy.

2. How can an attitude be distinguished from a ‘passing thought’ about someone or something?

3. **(a)** Outline what the tri-component model of attitudes is, ensuring you refer to its key assumptions.
   **(b)** Give a brief description of each component, with reference to an example of each component different from those used in the text.
   **(c)** Give an example that illustrates when the three components are consistent and an example of when they are inconsistent. Use examples different from those used in the text.

4. Prepare a graphic organiser to summarise an attitude based on the model shown in figure 9.12 on page 365. Use an example of an attitude that is of interest to you.
LIMITATIONS OF THE TRI-COMPONENT MODEL OF ATTITUDES

The inconsistency which can occur between the three different components of an attitude appears to the observer as an inconsistency usually between a person’s attitude and their actual behaviour. Attitudes and behaviour are also frequently linked because it is widely believed that attitudes play a significant role in influencing or even directing behaviour. Therefore, it is sometimes assumed that understanding a person’s attitude enables us to predict their behaviour with considerable accuracy. However, this assumption has been challenged by research findings.

One of the first and best-known research studies on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour was conducted by American sociologist Richard LaPiere (1934). LaPiere was interested in finding out whether there was a consistency between a person’s attitudes towards others with different racial backgrounds and their behaviour towards such people, as demonstrated by discrimination (treating them differently).

Over a two-year period, beginning in 1930, LaPiere travelled 16 000 km around the United States with a Chinese couple. They stayed in 66 hotels, motels or caravan parks, and dined in 184 different restaurants. LaPiere expected that he and his Chinese companions would experience considerable discrimination, because there was widespread prejudice against Asians in America at that time. However, they were actually refused service on only one occasion. LaPiere also found that their treatment overall was ‘good’ in nearly 50% of the places they visited.

Six months later, he sent a questionnaire and accompanying letter to the manager of each restaurant and the places at which they had stayed. In the letter he asked the question, ‘Will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?’ LaPiere received replies from about 50% of the places they had visited. In these replies, only one response stated that they would accept Chinese visitors as guests. As indicated by their responses, their attitudes clearly differed from their actual behaviour towards the Chinese couple.

LaPiere concluded that attitudes do not reliably predict behaviour. However, a number of criticisms have been made about LaPiere’s research method which may have led to a conclusion that was not valid. For example, LaPiere’s presence with the Chinese couple may have encouraged a different response from that which the Chinese couple may have received had they visited alone. Furthermore, while the group received good customer service face-to-face, the responses to the letters may have been completed by different employees from those who actually attended to them when they visited (Wicker, 1969).
Despite these criticisms, later studies have also found inconsistency between attitudes and behaviour. Most psychologists now believe that a person’s attitudes and behaviour are not always consistent and sometimes a person’s attitudes and observable behaviour will be unrelated or only slightly related (Aronson, 2011; Gilovich, et al., 2013).

Because our actual behaviours may not always reflect our true feelings and beliefs, some psychologists do not support the tri-component model of attitudes. Instead, they suggest that an attitude has only affective and cognitive components, and that there is no behavioural component.

However, most psychologists still support the tri-component model of attitudes but accept that it is unrealistic to expect attitudes to always correspond perfectly with behaviour because it seems that behaviour is rarely the product of a single influence — there are many influences on our behaviour besides our attitudes. But this does not mean that attitudes and behaviour are never closely related. Under certain conditions, attitudes and behaviour are more likely to match.

**BOX 9.5**

Cognitive dissonance

If we are aware of inconsistencies in our various attitudes, or when the way we actually behave is different from the way we believe we should behave, we can experience psychological tension or discomfort. This experience is called cognitive dissonance. For example, dissonance is likely to occur for people who continue to smoke even though they are aware that smoking is harmful to their health. When people experience dissonance, they try to reduce the discomfort they feel so they may change their attitudes or their behaviour.

American psychologist Leon Festinger (1957), who developed cognitive dissonance theory, believed that the experience of dissonance is psychologically unpleasant and people are not only motivated to avoid it, but will actively work at reducing or abolishing it.

According to Festinger, this can be done in several ways. One way is to change your attitude. You might absolutely adore your boyfriend or girlfriend but if they leave you for someone else, dissonance may occur. To reduce or avoid psychological discomfort you might say that it was only a crush and you are glad it is over. Similarly, if you miss out on a job for which you were interviewed you may conclude that the job was not what you really wanted anyway. In this way we avoid the unpleasant feelings of cognitive dissonance by changing our attitude.

Another way of reducing dissonance described by Festinger involves changing the behaviour to suit the attitude. For example, if you hold the attitude that sport is necessary to maintain good health yet do not play any sport, you could reduce dissonance by taking up basketball, hockey or some other sport.

Festinger also suggested that we can avoid dissonance by reducing the importance we give to our attitudes and behaviour. Using the sport example, you might say, ‘playing strenuous sport is not such a good idea and I probably get enough exercise in daily activities anyway’.

We can also add new elements to the situation to support our belief in the attitude or behaviour. Using the sport example again, you might say, ‘I don’t play sport because I have a bad knee’.

Festinger believes that people will choose the easiest course of action to reduce or avoid dissonance. This can often mean changing our attitudes.

Sometimes, however, people make no attempt to reduce or avoid dissonance. This may occur because they can tolerate some level of dissonance, particularly if the conflict is not too strong.

**FIGURE 9.15** If you are on a diet but feel like eating pizza, reading the label on the supermarket packet may provide some information about nutritional content which is comforting and thereby reduces dissonance.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.7**

**Analysis of research by LaPiere (1934) on attitudes and behaviour**

Analyse the experiment on attitudes and behaviour by LaPiere (1934). Your analysis should include responses to the following:

1. State a possible aim for the experiment.
2. Formulate a possible research hypothesis for the experiment.
3. Identify the operationalised independent and dependent variables in the experiment.
4. Identify the participants and how they were selected.
5. Briefly state the main results obtained.
6. Briefly state the conclusion that was drawn from these results.
7. Identify two possible limitations of the research method.
8. Identify a key ethical issue relevant to the research.
ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

There are many factors that influence whether attitudes and behaviour will be consistent. Research findings have identified a number of conditions when it is more likely that attitudes and behaviour will match. Some of the more important conditions involve how strongly we hold the attitude, how easily the attitude comes to mind, the situation we are in, and our personal belief that we can actually perform the behaviour associated with an attitude.

Strength of the attitude

A strong attitude is an attitude that is usually thought about, well-known and easily accessible. It also tends to be personally relevant and have a strong underlying emotional component. The stronger the attitude, the more likely it is that it will be stable and consistent over time, be resistant to change, and influence behaviour. Stronger attitudes are more likely to predict behaviour than weaker attitudes.

American social psychologist Stephen Kraus (1995) analysed the results of more than 100 research studies on attitudes and behaviour. On the basis of this meta analysis, Kraus concluded that an attitude tends to be closely linked to behaviour and can be used to predict behaviour when the attitude is strongly held. He also found that people with a strong attitude towards something tend to hold that attitude with a lot of confidence and certainty that it is the ‘right’ attitude. This means that the person who has long believed with great confidence that ‘boat people’ should be allowed to arrive on Australian shores is more likely to do something that demonstrates their attitude, such as writing a letter to a newspaper or their parliamentary representative in support of a policy change.

Accessibility of the attitude

Prominent American social psychologist Elliot Aronson has proposed that attitudes and behaviour are more likely to be consistent when the attitude is accessible to the person who holds the attitude. According to Aronson (2008), an accessible attitude is a strong attitude that easily comes to mind — it has been thought about, is well known and has been stored in memory ready for use.

For example, if asked to respond to the word ‘snake’, most people will be able to readily respond to the word in a way that reflects their attitude. Words such as ‘scary’ or ‘dangerous’ may come to mind. Similarly, our attitudes towards people we know are usually accessible. For example, most of us know someone about whom we immediately think ‘creep’ or ‘wicked’ when we see or think about them. Aronson believes that, in some cases, accessible attitudes are so closely related to behaviour that they can guide or even predict behaviour.

Social context of the attitude

American social psychologists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen (1975) have proposed that whether an attitude leads to actual behaviour may be dependent on the specific situation in which a person finds themselves. In some cases, the situation may dominate, or ‘overpower’, the affective and cognitive components of an attitude someone holds.
This can be illustrated by the situation in which a student has strong, unfavourable and almost entirely negative beliefs and feelings about a teacher, and expresses these openly to friends in the school grounds during recess. However, when encountering that teacher in the classroom, the student smiles and speaks respectfully and politely to the teacher. Consequently, when the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is being considered, the circumstances in which those attitudes are expressed must also be considered (Smith & Mackie, 2000).

**Perceived control over the behaviour**

Attitudes and behaviour are also more likely to match when people perceive that they have control over the behaviour that may be triggered by their attitude. *Perceived control* is the belief an individual has that they are free to perform or not perform behaviour linked to an attitude *and* a belief that they can actually perform that behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2002).

This means that someone who believes drink driving is dangerous and gets upset by media reports of alcohol-related road deaths, is likely to do something about it only if they believe that they *can* actually do something about it and there is nothing really stopping them from doing so. If they do not hold both of these beliefs, then they are unlikely to even try.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.8**

**Review questions**

1. (a) Can someone’s attitude be used to reliably predict their behaviour? Explain your answer.
   (b) Name and briefly describe each of the key factors that may influence attitude–behaviour consistency.
   (c) Rank each of the factors that influences attitude strength and explain your rankings for the highest and lowest ranked factors.
   (d) Suggest a factor which you believe influences attitude strength but has not been described in the text.

2. Can someone’s behaviour be used to reliably predict their attitude? Explain your answer.

3. There are many instances in everyday life when a person’s behaviour does not reflect their attitude. For example:
   (a) someone who criticises her friend for being unfaithful to her boyfriend, because the boyfriend is her brother, but who does the same thing herself and claims “it is different”
   (b) someone who claims that Australia should not accept migrants, but who enjoys eating at Vietnamese and Middle Eastern restaurants.

   From your experiences, describe two examples of a mismatch between an attitude which has been expressed and the behaviour which took place.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.9**

**Diagram of the relationship between an attitude and behaviour**

Using an example of one of your attitudes, prepare a concept map or another diagram which shows the relationship between this attitude and behaviour, and different factors which can influence the relationship.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.10**

**Media analysis of an attitude**

Select an item with a publicly expressed attitude on a topic of interest to you in the print or electronic media; for example, a letter to the editor in a daily or local newspaper, a blog item or a Facebook post.

Make a copy of the item (or provide the weblink or source) and answer the following questions.

1. Identify and briefly explain four possible factors that may have resulted in the author expressing the attitude in the media.

2. On the basis of your answer to question 1, to what extent was the author’s behaviour of writing the item predictable? Explain your answer.
FACTORS INFLUENCING ATTITUDE FORMATION

We are not born with particular attitudes towards school, studying, sport, drugs, religion, climate change, personal relationships, same sex marriage, surrogate children, refugees, asylum seekers, political parties, aliens, dirty jokes and so on. Attitudes are formed, usually over a long period of time, through the process of learning.

Psychologists have described three different types of learning which influence attitude formation: classical conditioning, operant conditioning and social learning. The process of forming an attitude through each of these types of learning is different, but each type does not necessarily occur in isolation of the others.

Classical conditioning

Classical conditioning is a simple form of learning which occurs through repeated association of two different stimuli, or ‘events’. Advertisers often use classical conditioning in an attempt to get consumers to associate a product or service with a particular person, object or event. For example, soft drink or fast food advertisements which show young, attractive people having fun use a neutral object (the drink or food item) and try to create positive associations with it. The intention is that consumers will learn to associate the product with good times and consequently buy the product.

Another example of classical conditioning used by advertisers to influence our attitudes to products is the contracting of well-known sporting identities to endorse products by wearing brand-name logos on their sports gear. Again, the intention is that the manufacturers want consumers to learn to associate their product with the skills and success of the athlete endorsing the product.

While these are examples of the formation of positive attitudes, negative attitudes can also be acquired through classical conditioning in the same way. In classical conditioning, it is the pairing and consequent association of two stimuli that is essential for learning to occur.

FIGURE 9.18 By repeatedly pairing a product with images and ideals consumers are likely to feel positive about, such as movie star Brad Pitt, the advertiser is using classical conditioning to make people learn to associate positive feelings with the product.

FIGURE 9.19 An example of attitude formation through classical conditioning.
Operant conditioning

Operant conditioning is a kind of learning through which we tend to repeat behaviour that has a desirable consequence (such as a reward), and tend not to repeat behaviour that has an undesirable consequence (such as punishment). The concept of reinforcement is very important in operant conditioning. Reinforcement is any event which strengthens (‘reinforces’) a response or increases the likelihood of a particular response occurring again.

Reinforcement works by providing a pleasant or satisfying consequence for that response. For example, a reward such as praise, a gift or money can strengthen a response made by a person. When an appropriate reward is consistently given for a behaviour it is likely that the behaviour will occur more frequently in the future. Similarly, if we are rewarded for demonstrating an inclination towards a certain attitude, or for expressing a particular attitude, the reward will reinforce the attitude, making us more likely to express the attitude in the future.

For example, if you stated an attitude which is held by your parents they may compliment your good judgment. The attitude might relate to your saying that one political party is better than another, or that getting a good job is important to success in life. Reinforcement of this attitude by your parents’ compliment is likely to strengthen the attitude, making you more likely to express it again in the future. Each time the attitude is reinforced, the stronger it is likely to become.

Punishment can influence the formation of our attitudes in a similar way to reinforcement, but it works in reverse. If punishment follows the expression of some comment or action indicating a specific attitude, then it may weaken the attitude, or suppress it (hold it back). For example, if you told one of your parents that you missed the last bus on Saturday night so you hitch-hiked home instead of ringing them, and you were grounded as a consequence of having hitch-hiked, then your attitude towards hitch-hiking would be more likely to weaken, or alternatively be withheld from your parents in the future.

Social learning

We often modify or adopt attitudes by observing other people, particularly people close to us and people who we respect and admire. This type of social learning is called observational learning or modelling. In social learning theory, the person being observed is referred to as a model. For example, if you observe your parents regularly conserving water at home and purchasing water-saving products such as a water-saving shower head or a water tank, it is likely you will adopt a similar attitude to water conservation.

We are more influenced by ‘models’ when we observe their actions being rewarded rather than criticised. Using the same example, if friends compliment your parents on their water conservation efforts, this will probably increase the likelihood that you will adopt a similar attitude, or strengthen (reinforce) an existing attitude about the importance of water conservation.

The media also reinforces particular attitudes. For example, television programs and advertisements often show males in leadership roles and females in roles not involving leadership. Children observe and sometimes reproduce what they see in the media with the result that their attitudes can be significantly influenced by media exposure.

FIGURE 9.20 This child’s attitude towards the Sydney Swans football club may have formed through reinforcement by her parents.

FIGURE 9.21 This child may form a positive attitude towards the use of guns by observing and modelling their parents’ behaviour.
We can also form attitudes through social learning processes without being consciously aware of it. For example, a child who initially has neither a positive nor a negative reaction to people of a particular social group may see one of their parents displaying negative body language towards members of that group. Consequently, the child may start to imitate such negative reactions towards that particular group and thus show early signs of prejudice.

### Repeated exposure

Attitudes can also form through **repeated exposure** — by simply being exposed to an object, person, group, event or issue repeatedly. Forming an attitude through repeated exposure also involves learning processes but the learning that has occurred is not immediately apparent. In all cases of attitude formation, however, some kind of personal experience is required (and experience is the basis of all learning). Experience may be either direct personal experience (for example, going bungy jumping) or indirect personal experience (for example, hearing about bungy jumping).

Research findings indicate that if we are exposed to an object, person, group, event or issue repeatedly, we can develop a positive attitude towards it. Furthermore, it has been proposed that the positive attitude develops regardless of whether or not there is a reward, motive or any sort of reason for doing so. Simple repeated encounters, which are neutral and don’t affect us in any way, are all that is needed to produce a positive attitude. This phenomenon is called the mere exposure effect.

The **mere exposure effect** describes the increase in liking for an attitude, object, person, group, event or issue as a result of being repeatedly exposed to it. The influence of repeated exposure on attitude formation was identified by Polish-born American psychologist Robert Zajonc (pronounced zy-ence).

In one experiment, Zajonc (1968) repeatedly exposed participants to various items that they were unlikely to have seen before, such as Chinese characters, nonsense words and photographs of faces. It was assumed that because the participants were extremely unfamiliar with these items, they had no attitude towards them before the experiment. Furthermore, it was assumed that the items were sufficiently ‘neutral’ to not influence the participants’ attitudes towards them. The participants were shown some of the items 25 times, and others 10 times, five times, or only once. The participants were then shown the entire group of items and asked how much they liked each one. Included with these items were other similar items which the participants had never seen before.

The results indicated that the more often the participants had seen the items presented in the experiment, the better they liked them, and the unfamiliar items were liked least. Figure 9.22 shows the results obtained following exposure to the Chinese characters at different frequencies (i.e. number of times shown).

Research also indicates that negative attitudes do not arise from repeated exposure unless there is a negative experience (such as dislike, pain, fear, disgust) associated with the exposure. If a negative experience is associated with the exposure, we may form a connection between the negative experience and the focus of the attitude. In many cases we need only one negative experience to form a negative attitude. For example, a single unexpected close encounter with a live snake in the bush can be enough to form a negative attitude towards snakes.

![Figure 9.22](image.png)

**FIGURE 9.22** Results from Zajonc’s (1968) experiment on the influence of repeated exposure on attitude formation
Many advertisers are aware of the repeated exposure effect and use it to try to influence formation of our attitude towards a product. The assumption is that, through repeated exposure, we will gradually start to like the advertised product without ever having tried it. However, it is also possible to start disliking a product after viewing endlessly repeated ads, which is why advertisers regularly change their ads (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2002).

Although there is considerable research evidence indicating that repeated exposure can lead to the formation of a positive attitude, not all psychologists agree on how this occurs. Most believe that repeated exposure involves learning processes such as reinforcement. For example, people like familiar items better because they recognise them, and the feeling of recognition is pleasant. This in turn acts as a reinforcer (Fazio, 1990). Some have proposed that familiarity or recognition underlies the formation of a true attitude. Their view is based on research evidence which suggests that people like things they have seen, even when they cannot recognise the items, and even when they are unaware that they have ever seen them (Bootzin et al., 1986).

**BOX 9.6**

**Repeated exposure to yourself**

If you are shown a photograph of yourself (the true image), then shown a reverse image of that photograph (the image you see every day in the mirror), you would probably prefer the reverse image because it is the one you are frequently exposed to and are therefore more familiar with. When we are given the same choice with a picture of family or friends, we tend to choose the true image (Mita, Dermer & Knight, 1977).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.11**

**Review questions**

1. Briefly describe each of the learning processes which influence attitude formation. For each learning process give an example of how an attitude may form, using examples different from those in the text.

2. Use the table below to summarise influences on attitude formation. In the left column of the table, list five attitudes that you hold. In the middle column, briefly outline a significant personal experience which may have influenced formation of the attitude. In the appropriate column(s) at the right, indicate which factor(s) best describes the way in which you formed the attitude.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Personal experience</th>
<th>Classical conditioning</th>
<th>Operant conditioning</th>
<th>Social learning</th>
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3. Consider figure 9.19 on page 372 showing the use of classical conditioning by advertisers to influence attitudes towards their products. Draw a similar diagram to show how operant conditioning can influence attitude formation, with reference to an example involving one of your attitudes.

4. Consider the results of the Zajonc (1968) experiment in figure 9.22. Briefly state the relationship between the two variables that have been graphed.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.12**

**Reflection**

Comment on whether terrorism is an effective way of changing political attitudes and decision making.
STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

When we meet someone for the first time, we typically judge them on how they look and behave, including their physical appearance, facial expressions and gestures. We also take account of what they say and how they say it. After our first impression and/or to help fill in gaps, we may ask for information about their age, where they live, which school they go to, the type of music they like and so on. We build up a view about them that can help guide the way in which we will interact with them.

Our initial evaluation of people is conducted very quickly and the first impressions that we develop tend to be lasting ones. This is called the *primacy effect*, whereby the initial impression we form of a person is more influential than any later information obtained. This is why psychologists suggest we should look our best for a job interview. The interviewer(s) will tend to make a judgment about our suitability for a position based on the first impression we give. Even though the first impression may not be accurate, it can still have a lasting influence.

![Figure 9.23](image)

**Figure 9.23** The first impression can be a lasting impression, which is why psychologists suggest we should look our best for a job interview.

Stereotypes

When we evaluate people, we tend to do so by trying to fit them into a category based on our knowledge of people and the world. For example, a person may be judged as being a member of a social group (such as male or female, young or old) and/or a member of a cultural or religious group (such as Australian or Vietnamese, Muslim or non-Muslim). This process of grouping or ‘fitting’ people into a category based on what we know about them is called *stereotyping*. Being stereotyped as belonging to a particular social or cultural group carries with it the belief by people who form the stereotype that all individuals in the group have the same characteristics.

A *stereotype* is a collection of beliefs that we have about the people who belong to a certain group, regardless of individual differences among members of that group. For example, a stereotype of a doctor might be: wealthy, drives an expensive car, lives in a big house, works long hours and is conservative. Stereotypes help us to make sense of our world by giving it order. They provide us with a general system which guides our interactions with others.

Because it is not possible for us to intimately know everyone we meet, we use stereotypes to assist us in knowing how we should react to new people we meet. For example, if you are at a party, meet an attractive person, then discover that the person is a police officer, your behaviour towards them may be influenced by the stereotypical view of police as being always ‘on the job’.

One problem with stereotyping is that stereotypes can be inaccurate. Stereotypes are often based on incorrect or inadequate information. Consequently, many social and cultural stereotypes are formed on the basis of little or no empirical evidence.

![Figure 9.24](image)

**Figure 9.24** This nun’s public behaviour may not fit the stereotype many people have about nuns.

When we stereotype a person as belonging to a particular group, we ignore their individuality. In particular, we tend to disregard information about the
individual that does not fit the stereotype we have of them. We are more inclined to pay attention to information that is consistent with a stereotype and ignore information that is not consistent with it. We often presume things about people because of the way in which they have been stereotyped. By doing this, we can bring some order and structure to the impressions we have of people (Aronson, 2011).

Another problem with stereotyping is that it can lead to social stigma — negative labels associated with disapproval or rejection by others who are not labelled in that way. As with individuals who suffer from mental disorders, when an entire social or cultural group is stigmatised, or negatively evaluated, then members of that group feel like outcasts who are devalued, ignored and rejected by others, simply because they are members of the stigmatised group. In turn, this can lead to feelings such as shame, disgrace, lower self-esteem, loss of self-confidence and restricted ambitions in life. Again, as with stigmatised individuals who have a mental disorder, social stigma can also have harmful effects on overall psychological wellbeing, particularly when membership of the stigmatised group is an important part of the individual’s self-concept or self-image (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998).

Finally, stereotyping can also lead to prejudice. Research studies have found that when stereotypes involve an ‘us and them’ type belief, this can provide a foundation from which prejudice develops. ‘Us and them’ is evident when we categorise ourselves and others into ‘ingroups’ and ‘outgroups’.

**Ingroup and outgroups**

American psychologist Gordon Allport (1954) proposed that people tend to categorise themselves and others into ‘ingroups’ and ‘outgroups’ which can in turn influence their attitudes towards the members of those groups.

Allport described any group that you belong to or identify with as an **ingroup**. For example, your friendship groups, peer group, family, school, religion, sex, race, culture, the country in which you live and even the AFL team you barrack for would be called your ingroups. An **outgroup** is any group you do not belong to or identify with.

When we categorise our social world in this way, we tend to believe that people belonging to our ingroups have individual differences but are generally more like us. Consequently, we tend to view them positively and more easily develop loyalty to them due to common membership of the same group. However, we tend to consider people belonging to an outgroup to be less like us and more like each other. We therefore are more likely to view them negatively.

Allport argued that this type of categorisation and stereotyping of members of ingroups and outgroups can lead to prejudice towards members of outgroups. Furthermore, we are more likely to give preferential treatment to, or discriminate in favour of, members of our ingroup when the opportunity arises. Research studies have provided evidence of this type of attitude and behaviour in both children and adults (Aboud, 2003; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002).

**Jane Elliot’s classroom activity**

The impact of distinguishing members of ingroups and outgroups on the basis of stereotyping was demonstrated in a controversial classroom activity by American primary school teacher Jane Elliot in 1968.

One Monday, Elliot announced to her year 3 class of 28 children in a small, all-white, rural community that those with brown eyes were superior and those with blue eyes were inferior. To make it more realistic, the brown-eyed children were given extra privileges such as more playtime and access to new play equipment. They were also constantly told that they were better than the blue-eyed children; for example, more intelligent and harder working. The blue-eyed children were repeatedly told that they were inferior and made to wear armbands to distinguish them in a more obvious way. They were also not allowed to drink from the same water taps used by the brown-eyed children.

Soon, the brown-eyed children refused to play with their blue-eyed classmates. They became arrogant and bossy, often treating them in nasty ways. The academic results of the brown-eyed children also improved, with some doing much better than ever before. The blue-eyed children became increasingly timid and began to complete their schoolwork poorly.

The following Monday, Elliot reversed the exercise. This time the blue-eyed children were told that they were superior and the brown-eyed children were told that they were dumb and lazy. Although the blue-eyed children started to behave as the brown-eyed children had in the previous week, their behaviour was not as intense, probably because they knew what it was like being in their position. Later that day, Elliot ended the activity.

**FIGURE 9.25 Jane Elliot**
LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.13

Analysis of Elliot’s (1968) classroom activity

1. Jane Elliot’s classroom activity is often described as an ‘experiment’.
   (a) Explain why it is not a true psychological experiment.
   (b) Explain why her activity is best described as a case study.
2. In point form or using a flow chart, outline what Elliot did.
3. What results did Elliot obtain?
4. In what way does Elliot’s activity illustrate how ingroups and outgroups can contribute to the development of prejudice and discrimination?
5. Identify three ethical issues that may be relevant to Elliot’s activity.
6. Elliot’s activity attracted nationwide attention and proved to be controversial. Suggest a reason for the controversy, other than ethics.
7. Give an example of how an Elliot-type activity involving ingroups and outgroups could be used to reduce prejudice and discrimination in the workplace.

BOX 9.7

Gender stereotypes in other societies

Anthropologist Margaret Mead (1935) studied many cultures in the Pacific region. Her findings on three New Guinea tribes illustrate the way in which gender role stereotypes can vary in different societies. While living in the same geographical region, the three tribes showed significant differences in the roles assumed by each gender.

The Tchambuli tribe possessed clearly defined gender roles, but these were nearly opposite to those assigned in Western society. Women were assertive, impersonal and the dominant gender. They also took the initiative in ‘courtship’. Males on the other hand were passive, dependent upon the females and concerned about personal appearance. While men gossiped and were homewakers, females were the head of the family.

In the neighbouring Arapesh tribe, the females and males displayed behaviour that has traditionally been considered feminine in Western society. Both genders were cooperative and passive, and were encouraged to be responsive to the needs of others. Both genders were responsible for childcare. In courtship, neither gender took an aggressive role.

In the Mundugumor tribe, both females and males tended to be highly aggressive and competitive. Cruelty, ruthlessness and violence were characteristics that were encouraged in both genders. In addition, gentle and caring behaviour by males or females was rarely observed.

FIGURE 9.26 Margaret Mead provided some of the earliest empirical research evidence for cultural differences in gender role stereotypes.

BOX 9.8

Stereotypes about older people in Australian society

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2014), Australia is fast becoming an ageing society. At the beginning of the twentieth century, 6% of the population was over the age of 60 years. In 2004, people over 60 years represented about 20% of the population, including 12% over 65 years. In 2013, about 19% of the population was aged less than 15, while 14% of the population was aged over 65 (including 2% aged over 85).

Based on current trends, it is estimated that the proportion of people aged 65 years and over will increase to 19% (from 14%), and the proportion of children (under 15) will decrease slightly to 18%. The proportion of people aged 85 and over will increase to 3%.

The ABS estimates that at around 2060, our population will be about 42 million. The proportion of people aged 65 and over will be about 23%, while 17% will be aged under 15. The proportion of people aged 85 and over will be 5%, which is more than double from its 2013 level.

Life expectancy is currently about 79.9 years for men and 84.3 years for women — a two and three year increase respectively since 1994 — and life expectancy is expected to increase further as the 21st century progresses. This means that for many people about a quarter or more of their lives will be spent in retirement.
While the number of over 65s is increasing, Australia has relatively low levels of mature age employment when compared to many other OECD countries, including the USA, UK, Canada and New Zealand. Mature age workers face significant barriers in regard to staying in and re-entering the workforce (National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, 2012).

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2015), negative stereotypes and assumptions of a ‘use by date’ are significant barriers that older Australians face when they look for meaningful work.

Many employers stereotype older people as less adaptable to change, less productive, hard to train, inflexible, less motivated, a risky investment and as having potential poor health. This stereotype is based on myths about the needs, interests and capabilities of older people rather than on facts. Following are some myths and facts about older people.

**Myth:** Older people are less productive than younger people.
**Fact:** Under actual working conditions, mature age workers perform as well as, if not better than, younger workers. When speed of reaction is important, mature age workers sometimes produce at a lower rate, but they are at least as accurate, have fewer workplace accidents, less absenteeism and lower rates of job turnover than younger workers.

**Myth:** Older people are set in their ways and unable to change.
**Fact:** Older people do change and adapt to the major events that occur in their lives, such as retirement, children leaving the family home, loss of a partner, moving and illness. Research findings also indicate that older people (aged 61–95 years) changed their attitudes as much or more than younger adults (aged 21–60 years) in response to personal experiences.

**Myth:** Older people can’t learn new things.
**Fact:** Older people usually take longer to learn something new. Differences with younger people tend to be due to variables such as lack of practice, motivation and learning style rather than age. ABS data shows that Australians aged 55–64 years are the fastest growing users of information technology. International studies indicate that appropriate training provided in a supportive environment can greatly assist older workers to learn new technology systems.

**Fact:** Studies generally find no significant differences between older people and younger people. Most people over the age of 60 report that they are happy and have satisfactory family and social lives, although those with a limited income may be exposed to increased isolation.

**Myth:** Older people are bad drivers.
**Fact:** People aged over 65 have significantly fewer car accidents than people younger than 65. People under the age of 30 years have the most accidents.

**Myth:** Older people are poor and dependent on the government for ‘handouts’.
**Fact:** Although retirement leads to a decline in income and over 75% of people over 65 rely on a government pension as the primary source of income, the majority of older people do not have incomes below the poverty line. Over 75% of people over the age of 60 are owners or purchasers of their own homes.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.14**

1. **What is a stereotype?**
2. (a) Distinguish between an ingroup and an outgroup with reference to relevant examples from your own experience.
   (b) How can categorising people into ingroups and outgroups lead to prejudice?
3. **How would you describe each of the following people?**
   Use two or three key words for each person.
   - Someone who drives a Ferrari
   - Someone who has had considerable facial cosmetic surgery

- Someone who has a pitbull terrier as a pet
- Someone who belongs to a bikie gang
- Someone who is a union leader
- Someone who is a vegetarian

Compare your responses with those of others in the class. In what way can stereotyped views influence how someone thinks, feels or behaves towards people whom they consider to fit the stereotype?

**FIGURE 9.27** Many older people still lead active and independent lives.
LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.15

Visual presentation on stereotypes
Prepare a Powerpoint or collage depicting a particular stereotype; for example, of football players, teachers, elderly people, adolescents, blondes or some other group. On the slides or images, identify the characteristics that collectively contribute to the stereotype.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.16

Reflection
Margaret Mead (1935) studied gender role stereotypes in other societies and found that they can vary in different societies or cultural groups (see box 9.7 on page 378).
Write four or five words that you believe ‘typically’ describe an adolescent male and do the same for an adolescent female. Comment on whether your adjectives suggest a possible gender role stereotype in Australian society.
If you were to ask someone other than a close friend or family member to write the adjectives, what differences might there be in their description? Suggest a possible explanation.

Prejudice

Stereotyping can lead to prejudice. The term prejudice literally means ‘prejudgment’. Because prejudice involves a judgment, it is usually considered to be an attitude, but specifically one for which the focus is on people. Like other attitudes, prejudice can be positive or negative. For example, someone may be prejudiced in favour of heavy metal musicians or against heavy metal musicians. This means that if you were to meet the lead singer of a famous heavy metal band, you will be inclined to either like or dislike them and to expect them to have certain personal characteristics based on your stereotypic view of ‘famous musicians’ or ‘famous heavy metal bands’.

Psychology has focused on the study of prejudice as a negative attitude, mainly because of the social problems that prejudice towards other people can cause. Consequently, prejudice is often defined in psychology as holding a negative attitude towards the members of a group, based solely on their membership of that group.

Any group can be the focus of prejudice. The group may be women, men, members of an ethnic group such as Chinese or Greeks, members of a particular religious group, indigenous people such as Aborigines, elderly people, bikies, people with a mental disorder, people with a disability or with a particular sexual preference, certain occupations such as artists or truck drivers, or even people who behave in a particular way, such as bullies or shy people.

A person who is prejudiced against some group tends to evaluate its members negatively merely because they belong to that group. Their individual characteristics or behaviour are usually overlooked. It does not matter if the information about an individual or a group is faulty or incomplete. They are viewed in a negative way simply because they belong to the specific group.

Prejudice often involves members of a majority group holding negative attitudes towards the members of a minority group. Members of a majority group are greater in number and are sometimes described as the ‘ingroup’, whereas members of a minority group are fewer in number and are sometimes described as the ‘outgroup’.

According to American psychologist Herbert Blumer (1961), there are four basic characteristics of prejudice which can often be observed among members of a majority social group who hold a prejudiced attitude towards members of a minority group:
1. they tend to believe that they are superior to the minority group to whom the prejudice is directed
2. the majority group tend to believe the minority group is different from them and that they ‘do not belong’
3. the majority group tend to believe that they are more powerful and important than the minority group
4. a majority group that displays prejudiced attitudes is insecure, fearing the minority group may become more powerful and important than itself.

Old-fashioned and modern prejudice

More recently, psychologists have distinguished between old-fashioned (or traditional) and modern forms of prejudice. Although a clear distinction can be made between old-fashioned and modern prejudice, these forms of prejudice tend to be closely related.

Australian psychologists Anne Pederson and Iain Walker (1997) describe old-fashioned prejudice as a form of prejudice in which members of the majority group openly reject minority group members and their views towards the minority group are obvious and recognisable to others. More specifically, the views of people with old-fashioned prejudice are much like those described by Blumer.

For example, old-fashioned racial prejudice typically involves a view that white people are biologically superior to black people and that the races should be segregated; that is, white people and black people should be separated or isolated from one another. People who are prejudiced in an old-fashioned way towards another race tend to believe that ‘blacks’ should be segregated from ‘whites’ in all aspects of life, such as employment, schooling, housing and the like. Many also believe and express strong racial stereotypes such as ‘Blacks are lazy and dumb’ and ‘Blacks are alcoholics and rely on government handouts’.

Pederson and Walker describe modern prejudice as a form of prejudice which is more subtle, hidden and expressed in ways more likely to be accepted within the majority group. For example, modern racial prejudice includes the belief that black people have the right to opportunities available to all members of
society, but they want more rights than anybody else and probably do not deserve these rights.

Someone with an attitude involving modern prejudice might publicly support an affirmitive (‘positive’) action program to help overcome the disadvantages experienced by minority group members in obtaining employment or access to tertiary education. However, they may have reservations about the fairness of such a program to members of the majority group. They are also more likely to keep their real views private and not share them openly when it is believed that these views may be socially unacceptable and may reflect on them in an unfavourable way.

In Australian society, and most other Western societies, modern forms of prejudice are more common than old-fashioned forms. This is mainly because open expressions of prejudiced behaviour such as name-calling, abuse and discrimination are illegal and not socially acceptable. However, this does not mean that prejudiced attitudes towards people in certain social groups have dramatically reduced or do not exist. Prejudice may be still be widespread, but more difficult to observe than in previous times when it was more openly expressed (Aronson, 2008; Vaughan & Hogg, 2002).

**Discrimination**

Prejudice can also be expressed through behaviour. When this occurs, it is called discrimination. **Discrimination** refers to positive or negative behaviour that is directed towards a social group and its members. Of particular concern to psychologists (and to Australian society in general) is discrimination against an individual or specific group.

Discrimination against people can take many forms. For example, it may involve behaviour such as ignoring people, excluding people from places or positions, bullying, putting people down, or, in its extreme form, it may be expressed in physical violence against a particular group, or even genocide. Genocide involves the extermination of an entire group, such as Hitler's attempts to kill all Jewish people during World War II.

**Direct and indirect discrimination**

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2015) describes two forms of discrimination — direct and indirect discrimination. In Victoria, it is against the law for someone to discriminate against another person because of a personal characteristic they have or are assumed to have. These personal characteristics are things
like age, race, disability, physical features and political beliefs.

Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because of a personal characteristic protected by the law. For example, direct discrimination would occur if someone was overlooked for a job specifically on the basis of their sex, marital status or some other relevant personal characteristic. Direct discrimination often happens because people make unfair assumptions about what people with certain personal characteristics can and cannot do. This would occur, for example, if an adolescent applied for casual work and was told by the employer that they missed out because ‘teenagers are unreliable’.

Indirect discrimination occurs when treating everybody the same way disadvantages someone because of a personal characteristic. For example, if an employer refuses to allow employees to wear any head covering in the workplace, this may be indirect discrimination against employees whose cultural or religious background requires that they wear a particular type of head covering.

Similarly, suppose that a factory requires all employees to start at 6 am. This might seem to treat everyone equally, but it could disadvantage employees who need to care for children, who are usually women. If it is not a reasonable requirement, this will be indirect discrimination.

Distinguishing between prejudice and discrimination

The basic difference between prejudice and discrimination is that prejudice is an attitude and discrimination is behaviour arising from prejudice.

When prejudice and discrimination are directed at people who are members of a particular racial or ethnic group, for example, Aborigines, Somalians or Muslims, it is called racism. When directed at women or men because of their sex, it is called sexism. When directed at people because of their age, it is called ageism.

Generally, the attitudes and behaviour of a person who is racist, sexist or ageist are often affected by the person’s belief that people of different races, sexes or ages have different personal characteristics and abilities. Furthermore, racism, sexism and ageism often result because a person (or group) feels superior to an individual or group in terms of race, gender or age, and regards them as being inferior or less able in one or more ways.
Sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification

It is against the law to sexually harass or victimise someone, or to vilify someone because of their race or religion.

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual behaviour, which could be expected to make a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment can be physical, verbal or written. It can include:

- comments about a person’s private life or the way they look
- sexually suggestive behaviour, such as leering or staring, brushing up against someone, touching, fondling or hugging
- sexually suggestive comments or jokes
- displaying offensive screensavers, photos, calendars or objects
- repeated requests to go out
- requests for sex
- sexually explicit emails, text messages or posts on social networking sites.

A single incident is enough to constitute sexual harassment — it doesn’t have to be repeated.

Victimisation is subjecting, or threatening to subject, someone to something detrimental because they have asserted their rights under equal opportunity law, made a complaint, helped someone else to make a complaint, or refused to do something because it would be discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation; for example, if Donna’s boss fires her after she complains that a colleague is sexually harassing her.

Vilification is behaviour that incites hatred, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of a person or group of people because of their race or religion. Behaviour that could be seen as vilification includes:

- speaking about a person’s race or religion in a way that could make other people hate or ridicule them
- publishing claims that a racial or religious group is involved in serious crimes without any proof
- repeated and serious spoken or physical abuse about the race or religion of another person
- encouraging violence against people who belong to a particular race or religion, or damaging their property
- encouraging people to hate a racial or religious group using flyers, stickers, posters, a speech or publication, or using websites or email.

Behaviour that is not likely to be seen as vilification includes being critical of a religion or debating racial or religious ideas in a way that does not encourage others to hate racial or religious groups, and actions that offend people of a particular race or religion, but do not encourage others to hate, disrespect or abuse racial or religious groups.

Comments, jokes or other acts related to the race or religion of a person may not be seen as vilification, but they could still be the basis for a complaint of discrimination. For example, Ranjit complains that a local bus driver asked him where he was from, told him to sit at the back of the bus and sniffed loudly as he walked past. This is not racial vilification but Ranjit might be able to make a complaint about racial discrimination to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.


Review questions

1 Define prejudice, with reference to an example.
2 (a) List Blumer’s (1961) four characteristics of prejudice.
   (b) Apply these characteristics to analyse a prejudice you believe is held by a majority social group in Australian society towards a minority group. Which characteristics do you believe may or may not be true? Explain your answer.
3 (a) Explain the difference between old-fashioned (traditional) and modern prejudice.
   (b) Which form of prejudice do you believe occurs most frequently in Australian society? Explain your answer with reference to an example(s).
4 Explain the difference between direct discrimination and indirect discrimination with reference to an example of each type of discrimination different from those used in the text.
5 (a) Describe the relationship between prejudice and discrimination.
   (b) What is the key difference between prejudice and discrimination?
6 (a) Explain the meanings of the terms racism, sexism and ageism.
   (b) How do ‘racists’, ‘sexists’ and ‘ageists’ tend to view someone of another race, sex or age?
   (c) Give an example of a racist, sexist or ageist comment.
7 Does bullying involve discrimination? Explain with reference to the legal meaning of these concepts (as defined by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission).
LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.18

Reflection
Give an example of a personal experience of discrimination at school or another social world setting. Suggest a possible way of preventing discrimination within this environment.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 9.19

Media analysis of a tri-component interpretation of prejudice
In box 9.3 on page 366 an example of gender prejudice is analysed in terms of the tri-component model of attitudes.

1 Find and make a copy of a suitable image(s) in the print or electronic media about racial prejudice.

2 Analyse racial prejudice in the same way.

3 Choose another example of prejudice and analyse it in the same way, including specific examples of each component.
SECTION A — Multiple-choice questions

Choose the response that is **correct** or that **best answers** the question.

A correct answer scores 1, an incorrect answer scores 0.

Marks will **not** be deducted for incorrect answers.

No marks will be given if more than one answer is completed for any question.

**Question 1**
The relationship between behaviour and attitudes tends to be
A. indirect.
B. consistent.
C. direct.
D. inconsistent.

**Question 2**
The statement ‘All obese people eat too much’ is an example of
A. prejudice.
B. discrimination.
C. person perception.
D. stereotyping.

**Question 3**
Which of the following characteristics is most likely to influence a first impression when meeting someone?
A. physical appearance
B. speech content
C. personality
D. intelligence

**Question 4**
Attribution theory generally **explains why** people
A. act the way they do.
B. form impressions of themselves and others.
C. perceive others as they do.
D. perceive themselves and others as they do.

**Question 5**
The fundamental attribution error is best described as our tendency to
A. make a basic mistake in person perception.
B. overestimate the importance of situational factors in judging ourselves.
C. overestimate the importance of personal factors ourselves.
D. overestimate the importance of personal factors and underestimate the importance of situational factors in judging someone else’s behaviour.

**Question 6**
Lucio is on vacation in Alice Springs and observes an Aboriginal adult being ejected from a hotel. He assumes that the person is probably an alcoholic and caused trouble. Lucio is unaware that the Aboriginal person is a non-drinker who had attended the hotel to forcibly take home his brother who is actually an alcoholic and often gets into trouble when he gets drunk.

Lucio’s assumption about the ejected Aboriginal person is **best explained by**
A. the just world belief.
B. modern prejudice.
C. the fundamental attribution error.
D. culture and attribution.

**Question 7**
Self-serving bias refers to a person’s tendency to attribute their successes to _____ and their failures to _____.
A. an actor; an observer
B. an observer; an actor
C. external factors; internal factors
D. internal factors; external factors

**Question 8**
Prejudice is a/an _____. whereas discrimination is a/an _____.
A. stereotype; behaviour
B. attitude; stereotype
C. behaviour; attitude
D. attitude; behaviour

**Question 9**
Which of the following statements best describes discrimination?
A. Discrimination involves positive action to support someone in a minority group.
B. Discrimination involves negative action against someone in a minority group.
C. Discrimination involves either positive or negative action towards someone in a minority group.
D. Discrimination involves stereotyping all individuals in a minority group whilst overlooking individual differences.
Question 10
Which of the following behaviours best indicates old-fashioned prejudice?
A. making negative comments about the sexual preferences of a male nurse
B. being unconcerned about the appointment of a female to a position not traditionally held by females
C. publicly expressing a view that all people should have equal rights
D. publicly expressing a view that all people should have equal rights, but privately being against equal rights for all people

Question 11
Jane, who is working full time, applies for a credit account with a department store. She is told that she cannot have an account unless her husband acts as a guarantor. The store does not require male employees to have a guarantor. 

This is an example of
A. stereotyping.
B. equal opportunity.
C. anti-discrimination.
D. discrimination.

Question 12
Self-serving bias tends to be less common in _____ cultures.
A. North American
B. Western
C. collectivist
D. individualistic

Question 13
An essential feature of an attitude is that it involves
A. an opinion.
B. evaluation.
C. prejudice.
D. behaviour that can be observed, either directly or indirectly.

Question 14
Sam takes a match winning shot at goal in the final seconds of the match and misses. He blames it on the slippery floor that caused loss of traction just as he released the ball. 

This is an example of
A. self-serving bias.
B. person perception.
C. actor–observer bias.
D. saliency bias.

Question 15
Which of the following factors influences repeated exposure in attitude formation?
A. learning
B. prejudice
C. discrimination
D. attitude strength

Question 16
An ingroup is best described as a group
A. to which people of a similar age or with common attitudes wish to belong.
B. to which someone belongs.
C. with members who have common attitudes.
D. with members who like to clash with outgroups.

Question 17
A person who is opposed to Japanese whaling is more likely to do something that is consistent with their attitude if he or she
A. reads a very informative article about the cruelty of Japanese whaling.
B. watches a news item on TV which clearly establishes the excessive slaughter of whales by Japanese whaling fleets.
C. has a very strong attitude against Japanese whaling.
D. has a prejudiced attitude towards Japanese people.

Question 18
An attitude is more likely to predict behaviour when the attitude is
A. formed in a social context.
B. strongly held.
C. under perceived control.
D. learned through cognitive intervention.

Question 19
Developing racist attitudes through watching and listening to a parent’s expression of racist comments within the family environment is best explained by
A. genetics.
B. social learning processes.
C. classical conditioning processes.
D. operant conditioning processes.

Question 20
Which of the following descriptions is an example of a dispositional attribution?
A. He smoked a cigarette because other people were smoking.
B. He smoked a cigarette because alcohol was not available.
C. He smoked a cigarette because he enjoys smoking.
D. He smoked a cigarette because he was offered one.
SECTION B — Short-answer questions

Answer all questions in the spaces provided. Write using black or blue pen.

Question 1 (2 marks)
Define social cognition, with reference to an example.

Question 2 (2 marks)
(a) What is the halo effect? 1 mark

(b) Give an example of its possible role in person perception. 1 mark

Question 3 (3 marks)
Distinguish between personal and situational attributions with reference to a relevant example.

Question 4 (2 marks)
Describe two factors that can influence whether attitudes and behaviour will be consistent.

Question 5 (4 marks)
(a) Explain what person perception is. 1 mark

(b) Give an example of how person perception assists adaptation to the social world. 1 mark

(c) Describe two factors that can influence person perception. 2 marks
Question 6 (5 marks)
(a) Mardi decided to take a gap year and complete volunteer work overseas before starting her tertiary studies. Using this example, describe the tri-component model of an attitude. 3 marks

(b) Describe two limitations or criticisms of the tri-component model. 2 marks

Question 7 (2 marks)
Distinguish between modern and old-fashioned prejudices with reference to refugees or asylum seekers.