KEY KNOWLEDGE

- the influence of status and social power within groups, and obedience and conformity on individual behaviour, with reference to theorists including Asch, Milgram and Zimbardo
- the influences on helping behaviour (or reluctance to help) including personal, situational and social factors
- factors that influence bullying (including cyberbullying) behaviour and the effects of bullying behaviour on an individual's psychological functioning
- positive and negative influences of media on individual and group behaviour, illustrated by advertising, television, video games and social media.

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Humans are social beings, and as such we spend much of our time in the company of other people. In our everyday activities we interact with and influence others in a variety of ways. Each and every one of us is the product of the relationships, groups, cultures and societies to which we belong. The person you are today is the result of the many interactions you have with others and the influence they have over you. Just as you have been influenced by others and the culture and society to which you belong, you have also influenced others with whom you interact in the many relationships and groups to which you belong.

One widely researched topic of interest in psychology is the various conditions that lead people to behave in ways they otherwise would not, and the various conditions that prevent people from behaving in ways that they ordinarily would.

We all like to think of ourselves as independent in what we think, do and say, making our own decisions without being influenced by others and that if we do follow others, it is because we choose to and want to do so. However, researchers have found that we may be more susceptible to influence by others than we think.

Have you ever considered why we yawn when we observe someone else yawning, laugh in response to hearing others around us laughing or turn to look in a particular direction when we see a group of people looking in that direction? In these instances, the influence others exert over us is usually unintentional.

There are also many instances where influence is intentionally exerted over others. For example, when television producers include prerecorded laughter within their comedy programs to influence viewers into believing that the show is funny, or when politicians announce inflated results from their own party’s opinion polls to influence others to vote ‘like everyone else’. Similarly, some street buskers might put money into their collection tins to prompt their audience to do the same and advertisers often use sports stars and celebrities in their attempts to influence us to purchase their products.

Sometimes, it is an individual who may influence the thoughts, feelings or behaviours of others. At other times, it may be a group of people who exert their influence over someone. For example, if your close friends all wear a particular brand of clothing, you may be influenced to wear the same brand, or if your family all support a particular football team, you may be influenced to support them too. It is only when we begin to understand the effects of the various social influences on our lives that we are more able to control future attempts to influence us.

FIGURE 10.1 Psychologists have investigated why some people are more susceptible to the influence of others and why some people can exert greater influence than others.
SOCIAL INFLUENCE

In psychology, the term social influence is used to refer to the ways in which others influence us. Social influence is defined as the effects of the presence or actions of others, either real or imagined, on the way people think, feel and behave.

Social influence is exerted in many different ways and may come from a person, a group or an institution such as a school, church or government. The impact of social influence may be constructive (helpful), destructive (harmful), or neutral (have no effect). In all cases, however, social influence involves a degree of pressure, varying from slight to intense, that is exerted on an individual to change their thoughts, feelings or behaviour in some way. This pressure from others can be real or genuine pressure, or it can be imagined; that is, it does not actually occur, but it is still experienced as real pressure. We do not always give in to the pressure — social influence can be, and often is, resisted.

In this chapter, we examine several different types of social influence on the individual and consider factors that can determine whether or not the individual will resist. Since social influence most often occurs when we are in a group situation, we first examine what a group is.

WHAT IS A GROUP?

Suppose two people are waiting for a bus. They are alone, sitting at opposite ends of the bench. Neither is looking at the other, but each is aware of the other’s presence. Are they a group? Are two people who go jogging together each weekend a group? Are five strangers riding in an elevator a group? Are the students in your psychology class a group? Are the tourists queuing for entry to an art gallery a group?

The word group is often used in everyday conversation to refer to any set of two or more people. In psychology, however, a group is considered to be more than a gathering of people. Although definitions vary slightly, there is general agreement that a group is any collection of two or more people who interact with and influence one another and who share a common purpose.

It probably did not surprise you that you need at least two people to form a group. But is there an upper limit to the number of people for a group? Can you have a group of thousands of people? For example, can the 90 000 spectators who attend the Boxing Day Test match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground be considered a group?

The number of people is just one of the characteristics of a group and the actual number of individuals is not so important. What is more important is that, for a collection of people to be called a group, the individuals involved must also interact with (for longer than a few moments) and influence one another. They must also share a common purpose, or goal.

Although the MCG spectators may interact with and influence one another occasionally during the game, for example, in a ‘Mexican wave’, the interaction is minimal and not actually the kind associated with true interacting groups. Members of groups act and react towards one another and typically have an effect on one another. Moreover, although a ‘Mexican wave’ may promote a sense of belonging for some spectators, this feeling is short-lived and unlikely to be shared by everyone present. Nor is it likely that the feeling of belonging is as well developed as that held by members of true groups — the feeling of being not merely in the group but part of the group.

In sum, those at the Boxing Day test match may be best described as a gathering of people in the same location engaged in a common activity. Psychologists often use the term collective (or aggregate) to describe such a gathering of people who have minimal direct interaction. The audience at a rock concert is a collective, as is a mob.

FIGURE 10.2 Which of these ‘collections’ of people is a group?
Under the definition of a group commonly used by psychologists, the two people waiting for a bus and the people lined up at the museum in figure 10.2 are not considered a group. Five strangers in an elevator are not a group (but could become a true interacting group if the elevator got stuck between floors). In contrast, the two joggers in figure 10.2 would be considered a group and the students in your class would also be considered a group. In both of these groups, the individuals involved are likely to interact frequently, often for longer than a few moments, and they often have a common purpose. They probably will communicate with and affect each other at different times, they may be aware of having something in common and they are likely to have a sense of belonging.

**FIGURE 10.3** Are these fans doing the Mexican wave at the Boxing Day test cricket match a group?

**BOX 10.1**

**Peer groups and cliques**

A *peer group* is usually made up of people who have similar interests, do the same sorts of things and often associate or interact with one another. For example, the peer group of an adolescent will be made up of other adolescents.

A peer and a friend are not necessarily the same. The term *peer* refers to anyone who has one or more characteristics or roles in common with one or more other individuals, such as age, sex, occupation or social group membership. However, *friendship* involves a positive relationship between two (or more) people who usually regard or treat each other in similar ways. Adolescents attending a particular school or college have many peers (other adolescents), but they may or may not have many friends (Kaplan, 2004).

A distinguishing characteristic of adolescence is the amount of time young people spend with their peers. Some typical features of an adolescent peer group are:

- It often has its own norms or standards of acceptable behaviour and anyone who breaks these norms may be rejected by other members of the group.
- It often has its own style of dress (including hairstyles), its own places for socialising, its own taste in music, dancing, sport and so on.
- It usually has its own special attitudes to matters such as sex before marriage, smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs, bullying and so on.
- It often has its own language or lists of expressions which may not make sense to anyone outside the peer group.
- Its members usually discuss their problems with one another but not with outsiders.

Australian psychologist John Cotterell (1996) describes the peer group to which most adolescents belong as a *clique* — a relatively small group of friends of similar age, and generally of the same sex. For example, when an adolescent speaks of ‘my friends’, ‘my mates’, ‘the girls’, ‘the guys’, or uses some other collective noun of this kind, they are usually referring to a *friendship clique*, an interaction-based grouping of peers who ‘hang around together’ and may be either close friends or ‘just friends’.

According to Cotterell, clique members communicate easily with one another, and spend a great deal of their time together simply talking and enjoying each other’s company. They vary in the extent of closeness or intimacy, ranging from individuals who are ‘friends’ only in a specific situation, such as a sports team or interest group, to clusters of close friends who are inseparable.

An adolescent may belong to several different cliques containing different friends; for example, team-mates at hockey practice after school, classmates in psychology lessons, ‘the guys’ at the party and the after-school ‘mates’ in the local neighbourhood. Some of these cliques meet only in a specific setting (for example, the basketball stadium or the local shopping centre), and the relationship is one of companionship that is restricted to this particular setting. In contrast, close friendships are not restricted to a particular setting.

**FIGURE 10.4** One of the most important and influential groups to which you belong is a peer group consisting of your friends, sometimes called a clique.
### LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.1

**Review questions**

1. **(a)** Explain the meaning of social influence as used in psychology.
   
   **(b)** Give an example of when you (or someone you know) has experienced ‘real’ pressure and ‘imagined’ pressure to think, feel or behave in some way and managed to resist the pressure. How difficult was this in each situation?
   
   **(c)** Do you believe that ‘imagined’ pressure can be just as powerful an influence on an individual as ‘real’ pressure? Explain your answer.

2. What four key characteristics distinguish a group from other collections of people?

3. What is a collective? Give an example different from those used in the text.

4. In what ways are a group and a collective similar and different?

5. Which of the following collections of people are groups?
   - members of a hockey team
   - psychologists attending an international conference
   - all the cyclists participating in a race
   - a duo of singers
   - 150 VCE students in a school
   - a church congregation
   - three friends who live in the same house
   - 23 looters raiding a store during a civil riot
   - campers at a caravan park
   - shoppers at a shopping centre
   - shop owners at a shopping centre
   - 16 British spectators with the same face paint sitting together at the Australian Open tennis tournament

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.2

**Visual presentation — groups and collectives**

Prepare a poster-style presentation on an A3 sheet of paper or in a digital format such as PowerPoint in which you:

- present images (e.g. photos, graphic representations) of three or four groups to which you belong
- define a group
- distinguish between a group and a collective
- define social influence.

Ensure the information is logically organised and you are concise with expression. Point form is acceptable.

### STATUS AND SOCIAL POWER WITHIN GROUPS

Within a group, each member can have an identifiable status. **Status** refers to the importance of an individual’s position in the group, as perceived by members of the group. For example, consider your family group. Who has the highest status and who has the lowest status? Do these two individuals rate as equals in terms of the amount of power they have in the family? Does each person have a similar amount of influence or control over the other? The answer to these questions is probably ‘no’.

It is important, however, to recognise that an individual’s status can have an important effect on their behaviour towards others in the group. Status can specifically affect the expectations that individuals have of each other’s behaviour and how individual group members relate to one another.

A person’s **status in a group** also determines the amount of power they have within the group. **Power** refers to an individual’s (or group’s) ability to control or influence the thoughts, feelings or behaviour of another person (or group). Interaction between any two or more individuals typically involves power to some degree. When power is involved in a social interaction, it is often described as **social power**.

Social power is a basic aspect of life as a social being and can be observed in all kinds of relationships and interactions, including those involving people we dislike, as well as friends and lovers. Even when individuals are unaware of their effect on others, this effect still exists to some extent. However, there are many situations where one individual will deliberately and consciously attempt to use their power to influence others.

### Types of social power

Psychologists have identified different types of social power. One approach to distinguishing between different types of power is summarised in table 10.1. Each type of power arises from the **source** of that power. For example, if a person has control over something you need or want, then that person has power over you.

The type of power used by an individual usually depends on their specific role as well as the specific situation. The status of an individual may also affect the type of power used in a specific situation. Often, more than one type of power is used simultaneously to exert influence.
TABLE 10.1 Types of social power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of power</th>
<th>Source of power</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>Ability to give positive consequences or remove negative consequences in response to specific behaviour</td>
<td>An employer has the power to give a pay rise or promotion; a teacher can reward students with grades, praise and privileges (and dismiss a student early from detention).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>Ability to give negative consequences or remove positive consequences in response to specific behaviour</td>
<td>An employer can dismiss an employee; a teacher can give detention, or not allow a student to attend a school excursion or function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate power</td>
<td>An individual’s status or position in a group, institution or society in general gives them the right (authority) to exercise power over those with a lower status or with less authority.</td>
<td>A group leader, manager, captain of a team, classroom teacher, police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td>Individuals identify with or want to be like or liked by this person.</td>
<td>A celebrity you want to be like or a friend who you want to be liked by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>Having special knowledge and skills that are desirable or needed</td>
<td>Classroom teacher perceived as knowledgeable in their subject; a supervisor of a workplace trainee or new employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational power</td>
<td>Having resources or information that are useful and are not available elsewhere</td>
<td>Someone who knows exactly what needs to be done to meet an important team goal within a strict deadline; someone who has had a specific experience that someone else wants to know about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.3**

Review questions

1. Define what is meant by the terms status and power.
2. Describe the relationship between status and social power in a group situation.
3. Give an example of a group situation in which you have:
   (a) considerable status
   (b) little or no status.
4. (a) Describe a group situation in which you have been involved where power has been exerted on an individual(s) in the group.
   (b) Using the information in table 10.1, identify the type of power(s) that was used to influence the group member(s) in the situation described in 4(a).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.4**

Reflection

What are some observations you have made of the effects of status and power in one or more groups in which you have been a member?

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.5**

Identifying types of social power

Identify one or more types of power that may be held or used by each of the following individuals:
- the cartoon character in figure 10.5 asking for the latrine (toilet) to be cleaned
- classroom teacher
- tennis coach
- witness to a crime who refuses to testify
- clinical psychologist
- host of a radio talkback show
- the Pope
- dog owner
- parking inspector
- pilot of a passenger jet
- museum tour guide
- famous actor
- soccer player with a penalty shot at goal
- prison guard.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.6**

Role play on types of social power

In groups of three or four, select one type of power described in table 10.1. Prepare a role play of an everyday situation that demonstrates the use of this power in influencing others. Present your role play to the class and ask other class members to identify which type of power was demonstrated in your presentation.
**BOX 10.2**

**SOCIAL HIERARCHIES**

Status and power within a group are often based on an individual's position in the ‘pecking order’ or social hierarchy that may have developed. A social hierarchy shows the order of dominance of different members of a group, with the most dominant individual (the leader) at the top and the least dominant individual(s) at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Among animals, the hierarchy is often determined by age, physical strength and sex; for example, the oldest and strongest male often becomes the most dominant animal and holds the position at the top of the hierarchy. In simple animal hierarchies, the general rules are male dominates female, bigger dominates smaller and older dominates younger individuals. There are, however, exceptions. For example, in breeding seasons, females may become more dominant, or at other times, a group of lower-ranking animals may band together to try to push out the highest ranked animal in the hierarchy.

**FIGURE 10.6** In this troop of baboons, the most physically powerful male is at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by other males, then females and infants.

**FIGURE 10.7** In this platoon of soldiers, the person at the top of the hierarchy is clearly evident.

**INFLUENCE OF STATUS AND SOCIAL POWER WITHIN GROUPS**

Status and social power within a group are often linked to the role each individual has in the group. A role is the behaviour adopted by an individual or assigned to them that influences the way in which they function or act in different situations and life in general. Basically, a role is a part an individual plays in life that carries with it expectations of how to behave in different situations.

We have many roles in everyday life. Some roles are relatively temporary in the context of our lifespan (for example, babysitter, student, casual employee, captain of a basketball team) and others are more permanent (such as female, brother, parent, friend, priest).

Regardless of whether a role is temporary or permanent, once the role is taken on, there is usually an expectation by other members of the group that the individual will behave in a way that is consistent with that role. These role expectations have a strong influence on an individual's behaviour within a group, especially when their role provides considerable power and status.

Generally, individuals tend to use their status and power in desirable ways and to the benefit of the group. In some cases, however, individuals misuse or abuse their power and status. One of the most significant demonstrations of the effects of power and status within a group occurred in a study that has come to be known as the Stanford Prison Experiment.
Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment

The Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) was conducted in the summer of 1971 by American psychologist Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in California. Zimbardo wanted to find out the psychological effects of being either a prison guard or a prisoner. To do this, he set up a simulated prison environment in the basement of the Stanford University psychology building, complete with cells, security doors and drab surroundings without windows or light.

Zimbardo’s participant selection procedure involved placing an advertisement in the local newspaper inviting male volunteers for a study on prison life that would run for up to two weeks for the pay of US$15 per day (equivalent to about US$150 today). Seventy university students replied to the advertisement and were each interviewed and given psychological tests. Twenty-four of those judged to be ‘normal, average and healthy’ were selected to be participants in the experiment. Equal numbers of participants were randomly allocated to either of the two experimental conditions — either a ‘mock guard’ or a ‘mock prisoner’. This was achieved by the toss of a coin. The experiment actually commenced with nine guards and nine prisoners. The remaining guards and prisoners from the sample of 24 were ‘on call’ in case they were needed (Zimbardo, 2015a, 1972).

Having the role of prison guard carried considerable power and status within the entire group of research participants. Having the role of prisoner carried minimal power and little or no status. As events unfolded, power, status and role expectations associated with being a guard or prisoner brought about unexpected changes in behaviour.

To enhance reality, participants selected as prisoners were arrested at their homes by real police. This surprised the prisoners as they had been told to wait at home until ‘contacted’. Following their arrest, they were taken to a police station where they were searched, fingerprinted and charged with committing an offence. They were then taken to the ‘mock prison’ where they were stripped naked, skin-searched, sprayed for head lice, issued with a uniform, bedding, soap and a towel and placed in a 2 × 3 metre barred cell with two other prisoners.

FIGURE 10.8 Philip Zimbardo (1933– )

Zimbardo’s website on the SPE, including video of the experiment

Weblink

Weblinks

Documentaries on the SPE

FIGURE 10.9 (a) In the Stanford Prison Experiment, ‘mock prisoners’ were arrested by local police officers. (b) The prisoners were locked up in a ‘mock prison’.
The prisoners were required to ask permission from the guards to perform routine activities such as using the toilet, smoking a cigarette or writing letters. They were also required to refer to themselves and each other by their prison numbers and to the guards as ‘Mr Correctional Officer’. Guards were given military-style khaki uniforms to wear, clubs (similar to batons) and whistles to use in maintaining order, and reflective sunglasses to conceal their identities and emotions. They worked eight-hour shifts and went home when not on duty. Although instructed not to use physical violence, guards were allowed considerable freedom in developing rules and strategies to keep the prisoners under control.

All of these procedures ensured the guards believed that they had considerable status and power. According to Zimbardo (2009), their role was ‘power laden’ and it took them only a day to ‘adapt to their new, unfamiliar roles as dominating, powerful and coercive’.

On the second day of their imprisonment, the prisoners staged a number of disturbances, but their rebellion was quickly stopped by the guards. Over the next few days the guards behaved with increasing aggression and became more authoritarian. They used their power to make the prisoners smile, laugh or refrain from smiling or laughing, on command, for no apparent reason. They encouraged prisoners to call each other names and made them do things like clean the toilets with their bare hands.

The prisoners became increasingly traumatised, passive and dehumanised. Four prisoners had to be released during the first four days because of reactions such as rage, hysterical crying, confusion, severe anxiety and depression. One had to be released early after developing a rash all over his body. The rash was diagnosed as being stress related. Each day the guards abused their power further by tormenting the prisoners with more frequent commands, insults and demanding tasks.

Although the experiment had been planned to last for two weeks, it was terminated after six days because it was getting out of control. Every aspect of the prisoners’ behaviour ‘fell under the total and arbitrary control of the guards’. However, the guards were abusing their power and becoming genuinely brutal and vicious towards the prisoners who, in turn, were becoming withdrawn, submissive and bitter.

According to Zimbardo (2013), ‘we observed and documented on videotape that the guards steadily increased their coercive and aggressive tactics, humiliation, and dehumanisation of the prisoners day by day. The staff (researchers) had to remind the guards frequently to refrain from such abuses… and displays of their dominating power and authority.’

Most of the participants never forgot how they had behaved in the experiment, whether they were guards or prisoners. A number of participants temporarily suffered emotional distress which was not present prior to the experiment. At the conclusion of the experiment, one guard commented: ‘I was surprised at myself… I practically considered the prisoners cattle and I kept thinking: I have to watch out for them in case they try something’ (Zimbardo, 1975). While the prisoners were relieved that their ordeal was over, the guards were reluctant to give up their positions of power.

The results of this experiment showed that the behaviour of normal, well-educated men can be significantly affected when a role they are given involves considerable power and status. Zimbardo (2015a, 2013) believes that the findings of his experiment can be applied to the harsh and sometimes inhumane treatment of prisoners in real-life prisons. He believes that ‘prisons are places that demean humanity… and bring out the worst in social relations among people. They are as bad for the guards as the prisoners in terms of their destructive impact…and continue to be places of evil… that are failed experiments’.
FIGURE 10.11 The ‘mock guards’ abused the status and power which came with the role they had been randomly allocated.

FIGURE 10.12 Guard and prisoner behaviour across 25 observation periods over six days in the Stanford Prison Experiment. Note the substantial difference between the dominating, controlling, hostile behaviour of the guards and the passive resistance behaviour of the prisoners.
Ethical issues in Zimbardo’s experiment

The Stanford Prison Experiment provides valuable insights into the effects of status and power on individual behaviour. The experiment also raises important ethical issues and has been criticised by many psychologists on ethical grounds.

Zimbardo (2015a, 2013) has addressed these criticisms by arguing that his study was both ethical and unethical. It was ‘not unethical because it followed the guidelines’ of the Ethics Committee that reviewed it and approved it.

There was no deception; all participants were told in advance that, if they became prisoners, many of their usual rights would be suspended and they would have only minimally adequate diet and healthcare during the study. Their rights should have been protected by any of the many citizens who came to that mock prison, saw the deteriorated condition of those young men, and yet did nothing to intervene — among them, their own parents and friends on visiting nights, a Catholic priest . . . and many professional psychologists . . . and staff of the psychology department, all of whom watched live action videos of the study or took part in parole board hearings or spoke to participants and looked at them directly.

Furthermore, ‘we ended the study earlier than planned, ended it against the wishes of the guards, who felt they finally had the situation under their control, and that there would be no more disturbance or challenge by the prisoners’.

Zimbardo states that his study was unethical ‘because people suffered and others were allowed to inflict pain and humiliation on their fellows over an extended period of time; all participants were exposed to ‘seeing and hearing the suffering’ of prisoners who ‘had done nothing to deserve punishment and abuse’; and ‘we did not end the study soon enough. We should have terminated it as soon as the first prisoner suffered a severe stress disorder on Day 2’.

BOX 10.3

Real-life prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib

In March 2003, the Iraq War commenced with the invasion of Iraq in the Middle East by a multinational force consisting mostly of American and British soldiers. The invasion was based on a belief that Iraq possessed ‘weapons of mass destruction’. The international community, including Australia, was fearful that Iraq would use the nuclear and chemical weapons in a hostile way. When Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, was overtaken, the Abu Ghraib prison was re-established as a detention centre for Iraqi prisoners of war.

In 2004, photos (and videos) such as those shown in figure 10.13 were leaked from the Abu Ghraib prison. Many of these images were taken by military personnel who were serving as guards in the prison. The photos appeared in newspapers throughout the world and shocked most people. Investigations gradually revealed details of how the prisoners were abused and treated inhumanely in many ways by both the male and female guards. Unlike Zimbardo’s prison experiment, this happened in real life. The guards who committed the inhumane acts all did so voluntarily. They were all eventually sentenced to lengthy prison sentences.

FIGURE 10.13 Torture and humiliation at Abu Ghraib

eGuideplus

Weblinks
- Interview with Zimbardo on parallels between his SPE and Abu Ghraib 13m 59s
- Zimbardo TED talk 23m 10s
OLEARNING ACTIVITY 10.7

Review questions

1. Explain how status and social power can affect behaviour within a group, ensuring you refer to the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) and the behaviour of both guards and prisoners.

2. Can the findings of the SPE be generalised to:
   (a) prison situations in real life, as described in box 10.3?
   (b) group situations in real life other than prisons?

3. (a) Identify and describe three of the more significant breaches of current ethical guidelines for human research that occurred in the SPE.

   (b) Comment on the ethical beneficence of the research.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.8

Reflection

Comment on whether you would have behaved like the guards in the SPE and explain why you hold this belief.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.9

Analysis of Zimbardo's (1971) SPE

Prepare a flow chart summary of the main features of Zimbardo's SPE. The flow chart should include the following:

1. a possible aim of the experiment
2. a possible research hypothesis
3. who the participants were and how they were selected
4. the experimental conditions and key variables that were measured, stated in operational terms
5. the main results obtained
6. the conclusion that was drawn from these results
7. whether the experiment has external validity, with reference to a possible generalisation
8. two main limitations or criticisms of the research method
9. key ethical issues.

OBEDIENCE

There are many occasions in everyday life when we change our behaviour in some way to fit in with whatever is required in a particular situation. The pressure to do so often occurs in subtle, not so easily identifiable ways; for example, when it ‘feels right’ to be more or less noisy. We also change our behaviour in response to more obvious influences.

This can occur when we are required to do something because someone with authority asks or tells us to do or not do something. For example, our parents, teachers, sports coaches and employers are all authority figures who have the power to get us to behave in certain ways in particular aspects of our lives. When they ask us to do something that is clearly in their area of power, we usually obey and do as we are told. When we defy them, we usually do so knowing that there may be undesirable consequences.

From a very early age, we learn that we must be obedient when someone with legitimate authority over us commands us in some way or other to behave in a certain way. Obedience occurs when we follow the commands of someone with authority, or the rules or laws of our society. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term compliance.

However, while compliance involves changing one’s behaviour in response to a request to do so, it does not necessarily involve an authority figure.

Leaders in groups are often in the powerful position of being able to exert influence over other members of the group. Why do other group members usually obey the leader? This question becomes important when the leader attempts to exert their power and influence over other group members, pushing them to behave in a manner that is different from the way in which they want to behave or would normally behave.

Several disturbing historical events sparked interest in this question among psychologists. An example is the gassing, starving and shooting of millions of Jewish people in concentration camps during World War II by Nazi soldiers under Hitler's direction. Psychologists often refer to this situation as one involving ‘blind obedience’ to authority. Victims were usually unknown to their executioners and were, in the main, unseen.

Did all those Nazi soldiers who carried out Hitler's instructions support this course of action, or were they ‘just following orders’ as they stated at the Nuremberg trials of war criminals following World War II?

FIGURE 10.14 Mass grave of Jews killed during World War II. In defence of their actions, Nazi soldiers and officials stated that they killed and maimed people because they were ‘just following orders’.
Milgram’s experiments on obedience

In a series of well-known and very controversial experiments, American psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963) investigated factors that can influence obedience to an authority figure. In all, there were 19 variations of the experimental procedures to identify specific influences.

For his first experiment, Milgram advertised for 40 male research participants between the ages of 20 and 50 years, offering to pay them US$4 (equivalent to about US$35 today) for one hour of their time to participate in an experiment at Yale University in the state of Connecticut. He wanted to find out whether individuals would obey an authority figure who was instructing them to inflict pain on another person. Participants were informed, however, that they were involved in a study on ‘the effects of punishment on learning’. Imagine yourself as one of the respondents to the advertisement and as one of Milgram’s participants being treated in the following way.

You arrive at the university to be met by one of Milgram’s assistants, the experimenter, dressed in a white laboratory coat. You chat with the experimenter who seems quite friendly and the purpose of the research is explained. You and another participant (who, unknown to you, is a ‘confederate’ working for the experimenter) draw slips of paper to determine who will be the ‘teacher’ and who will be the ‘learner’. Again, unknown to you, the draw is rigged so that the participant (you) always becomes the teacher and the confederate (experimenter’s assistant) is always the learner.

The learner is taken to an adjoining room, strapped into a chair wired through the wall to an electric shock machine and has electrodes placed on their wrists. You witness all this before being taken to your seat in the next room and receiving instructions about your task — to teach the learner to remember pairs of words.

You are instructed that each time the learner makes a mistake you are to deliver a brief shock of increasing intensity through a shock generator with 30 levers marked at 15-volt intervals from 15 to 450 volts (see figure 10.15 (a)). The shock generator also has descriptions of the severity of the shock levels from ‘slight shock’ to ‘danger’ to ‘severe shock’. On the first error, you are required to administer 15 volts and are to move up to the next higher voltage for each further error. With each flick of the switch, lights flash and an electric buzzing sound fills the room.

In a series of well-known and very controversial experiments, American psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963) investigated factors that can influence obedience to an authority figure. In all, there were 19 variations of the experimental procedures to identify specific influences.

For his first experiment, Milgram advertised for 40 male research participants between the ages of 20 and 50 years, offering to pay them US$4 (equivalent to about US$35 today) for one hour of their time to participate in an experiment at Yale University in the state of Connecticut. He wanted to find out whether individuals would obey an authority figure who was instructing them to inflict pain on another person. Participants were informed, however, that they were involved in a study on ‘the effects of punishment on learning’. Imagine yourself as one of the respondents to the advertisement and as one of Milgram’s participants being treated in the following way.

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Deliberately, the learner (confederate) makes errors. By the fifth error (75 volts), you hear a grunt from the next room. If you question the experimenter as to whether to continue you receive a standard reply, ‘The experiment requires that you must continue’. Then, if you show further reluctance to continue administering the shocks, you are told, ‘It is absolutely essential that you continue’ and finally, ‘You have no other choice, you must go on’.

If you continue to administer the shocks, after the eighth error (120 volts), the learner cries out, at 150 volts the learner demands to be let out, at 180 volts the learner cries that they cannot stand the pain any longer and at 300 volts the learner refuses to continue and becomes silent. How would you feel as the teacher at this point? How far would you go in administering the shocks? How obedient would you be in this situation?

After the experiment, all participants (the ‘teachers’) were debriefed and informed that the learners did not actually receive the electric shocks and that they were confederates of the experimenter. The results were unexpected — of 40 participants, none stopped administering the shocks before 300 volts and 26 continued to administer the shocks at the 450-volt level. Five participants refused to go on with the experiment at 300 volts when the learner began kicking the walls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity of shock</th>
<th>Percentage of participants who obeyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely intense</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXX: Most powerful (450v)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 10.16](image-url) Results of the Milgram (1963) experiment. The data show that 65% of participants obeyed an authority figure to the extent that they potentially put someone else’s life at risk by doing so.

**TABLE 10.2 The learner’s protests in the Milgram experiment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voltage (volts)</th>
<th>Protest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Ugh! (louder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Ugh! Hey this really hurts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Ugh!!! Experimenter! That’s all. Get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart’s starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart’s starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Ugh! Let me out! (shouting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>Ugh! I can’t stand the pain. Let me out of here! (shouting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>Ugh! Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart’s bothering me. Let me out of here! You have no right to keep me here! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! My heart’s bothering me. Let me out! Let me out!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td>Ugh! Experimenter! Get me out of here. I’ve had enough. I won’t be in the experiment any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>Ugh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>Ugh! Get me out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>(Agonised scream) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Do you hear? Let me out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>285</td>
<td>(Agonised scream)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>(Agonised scream) I absolutely refuse to answer any more. Get me out of here. You can’t hold me here. Get me out. Get me out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315</td>
<td>(Intensely agonised scream) I told you I refuse to answer. I’m no longer part of this experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>330</td>
<td>(Intense and prolonged agonised scream) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart’s bothering me. Let me out, I tell you. (Hysterically) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. You have no right to hold me here. Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! Let me out!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Milgram’s experiments attracted a great deal of interest among psychologists. Many variations of his standard experiment were subsequently conducted in other countries and cultures, including Australia, Austria, England, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Spain and the Netherlands. These studies produced a range of results, with the level of obedience found to be higher in some studies and lower in other studies than that in Milgram’s original experiment, but nonetheless still occurring at a significant level.
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.10

Review questions

1. Define what is meant by the term obedience.
   (a) In what way is compliance like obedience?
   (b) In what way is compliance different from obedience?
2. Why was Milgram's (1963) experiment 'very controversial'?
3. How obedient do you believe you would be as a 'teacher' in Milgram's experiment? Explain your answer.
4. Is obedience to authority likely to be influenced by an individual's cultural background? Briefly explain with reference to research findings.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.11

Reflection

Comment on how far the teachers' responses in Milgram's experiment reflect what happens in real life. Explain your opinion with reference to an example.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.12

Analysis of research by Milgram (1963) on obedience to authority

Prepare a flow chart summary of the main features of Milgram's experiment on obedience to authority. The flow chart should include the following:

1. A possible aim of the experiment
2. A possible research hypothesis
3. Who the participants were and how they were selected
4. The experimental conditions and key variables that were measured, stated in operationalised terms
5. The main results obtained
6. The conclusion that was drawn from these results
7. Whether the experiment has external validity, with reference to a possible generalisation
8. Two main limitations or criticisms of the research method
9. Key ethical issues

Factors affecting obedience

Milgram's original experiment on obedience to an authority figure used a sample made up entirely of adult male participants. In subsequent experiments, Milgram (1974) tested the effect of other variables on obedience. For example, in another study, 40 adult females showed the same level of obedience as did the males - 65% delivered an electric shock to the maximum intensity of 450 volts.

Similar results have also been obtained in different countries throughout the world using people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including children and elderly people in the role of the teacher. Most participants expressed considerable distress at what they were asked to do, yet most also continued to obey.

In sum, obedience in a 'Milgram-type' experimental situation seems to occur regardless of gender, socio-economic background, age or culture. Does this mean you would be likely to obey an authority figure to deliver 450 volts that could kill somebody? The answer is 'Not necessarily'.

It appears that several factors interact in influencing someone to obey an authority figure. These factors include how close the authority figure is to the person who must obey, whether the authority figure is perceived as being legitimate and having power, and group pressure to obey.

Social proximity

Generally, social proximity refers to the closeness between two or more people. This may include the physical distance between the people as well as the closeness of their relationship. In Milgram's experiment, social proximity was defined as the physical distance between the teacher and learner, including whether or not the teacher is physically present in the same room as the learner.

Milgram found that, the closer the learner ('victim') was to the teacher (person administering the shock), the more likely that person was to refuse to administer the shock. For example, as shown in figure 10.16 on page 403, when the teacher was in the same room with the learner and standing only 45–50 cm away, the number of fully obedient teachers dropped from 65% to 40%. And when the teacher was required to force the learner's hand down into contact with a simulated 'shock plate', the number of fully obedient teachers dropped to 30%.

Milgram also found that when the teacher was out of the room and issued his or her orders by telephone, the number of fully obedient teachers dropped to about 20%. Furthermore, in this experimental condition, the experimenter's authority was frequently defied. For example, several of the teachers administered shocks of lower intensity than they were supposed to and never told the experimenter that they were doing this.

In situations outside the laboratory, it seems that it is also easier to obey an order to do something horrific when the victim is distant and not physically nearby or visible. For example, consider how much 'easier' it might be during a war to obey a military command to drop a bomb from a high-flying aeroplane and kill thousands of helpless people, as compared with obeying a command to shoot and kill a helpless individual standing in front of you. It is also 'easier' to sign a document ordering someone's torture or death than to actually torture or kill them yourself.
Legitimacy of authority figures

An individual is also more likely to be obedient when the authority figure is perceived as being legitimate and having power. As shown in figure 10.16 on page 403, when an 'ordinary person' (someone with no particular authority) instead of the experimenter gave the orders, full obedience dropped from 65% to 20%.

In one variation of his experiment, Milgram (1974) set up a situation in which the experimenter received a fake telephone call that required him to leave the laboratory. After the experimenter left, another confederate who was posing as a participant entered the room and took charge. He ‘decided’ that the shock should be increased one level for each wrong answer and ordered the teacher to follow this command.

With the legitimate authority figure gone and someone with no apparent authority in charge, 80% of the teachers often ignored the confederate and refused to comply fully. When the confederate pretended to be disgusted by this defiance and sat down in front of the shock generator and tried to deliver the shock himself, most of the defiant participants protested vigorously. Some even tried to unplug the shock generator so it could not be used. In one instance, a physically big teacher actually picked up the confederate from his chair in front of the shock generator and threw him across the room. This ‘rebellion’ against an illegitimate authority figure contrasted sharply with the compliance usually shown to the ‘authoritative’ experimenter.

In Milgram’s (1963) original experiment, the authority figures were easy to recognise because all the experimenters wore white lab coats. They looked like ‘expert scientists from a prestigious university’ and this helped reinforce the legitimacy of their authority in the experimental situation.

In everyday life, individuals in authority also tend to have visible signs of their authority. Police officers, paramedics, firefighters, parking officers and security guards all wear uniforms. CEOs of large corporations and politicians wear suits. Doctors in hospitals wear stethoscopes around their necks. These symbols of their authority are often enough to bring about obedience. When confronted by these obvious signs and reminders of who is in charge, many people find it difficult to resist.

Group pressure

An individual is also more likely to be obedient where there is little or no group support for resisting the authority figure. As shown in figure 10.17, when the ‘teachers’ were exposed to the actions of disobedient people who refused to obey the authority figure’s commands, full obedience dropped from 65% to about 10%.

Milgram observed this effect of group pressure by placing the teacher with two confederate teachers. Initially, the two confederates pretended to collaborate by agreeing to follow the shock administration procedure. Then, they pretended to defy the experimenter and refused to administer shocks after the 150 volt to 210 volt range. After the participant observed this disobedience, the confederates turned to the participant and ordered them to administer the shock. Almost 90% refused to do so.

The results also indicate that an individual is more likely to be obedient where there is group support for the authority figure. As shown in figure 10.17, when the teachers were exposed to the actions of two people who consistently obeyed the authority figure’s commands to the end, full obedience increased from 65% to 72.5%. 
**FIGURE 10.18** We are more likely to obey an authority figure when we perceive them as having legitimate authority. A uniform provides a readily visible sign of someone’s authority.

**FIGURE 10.19** Many civilian protests against government corruption and human rights abuses have been met by troops obeying orders to forcibly stop them. The power of obedience leads young soldiers to carry out these orders and murder people. Observing other soldiers obeying the order is one factor that influences their compliance.
In Milgram's study, participants were faced with the dilemma of whether to obey an authority figure or consider the health and safety of another human being. Obedience to authority was the more common response. Milgram's study demonstrates how strong social influence is in affecting individuals' behaviours. Individuals will often rationalise, or justify, their behaviour by offering the excuse that they cannot be held responsible for their actions because they are acting under instructions.

Experiments such as those conducted by Milgram provide an interesting and important insight into human behaviour. We are often confronted with situations where we have to decide whether to do what others are expecting or demanding from us, or take a stand against their expectations or demands. However, you should keep in mind that the Milgram experiments provide an example of authority being abused. Without obedience to the laws of our democratic society, groups could not function and social life in the way we are accustomed to it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

**Ethical issues in Milgram's experiments**

A common criticism of studies of obedience, such as those conducted by Milgram, is that they are unethical. For example, according to current ethical standards for human research, a participant's full and informed consent must be obtained prior to the start of an experiment, the participant's health and wellbeing must be safeguarded and the participant must be informed about their rights and permitted to withdraw whenever they choose to do so. Milgram's experiment seems to have disregarded each of these standards.

Milgram did not actually obtain informed consent from his participants. To do so would have meant that participants had full knowledge of the real purpose and nature of his research. This would have undoubtedly influenced their natural responses in the experiment and, therefore, the results.

To avoid this, Milgram used deception. This means the participants were intentionally misinformed about what the experiment actually involved. Consequently, the participants did not truly give informed consent when they agreed to participate in the research study. There were also other deceptions after the participants had agreed to take part in the experiment. For example, participants were introduced to someone whom they were led to believe was another participant, but who was in fact a confederate, and participants drew slips of paper to determine who was to be the teacher and who was to be the learner, but the draw was rigged to ensure that the confederate would always be the learner.

It is also clear that the mental health and wellbeing of participants were not adequately safeguarded. In fact, for one experiment, Milgram (1974) reports a participant as having been ‘reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck who was rapidly approaching a state of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobes, and twisted his hands. At one point, he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: “Oh God, let's stop it!” But Milgram did not intervene and *stop* the experiment.

Nor did Milgram make it clear to the participants that they could withdraw from the experiment whenever they wanted to do so. While they were free to withdraw in the sense that they were not tied down or locked up in the experimental room, it was never made clear to them that they could withdraw. The fact that the participants were paid money to *part in* the experiment also placed a certain obligation on them not to end their participation.

Ethical standards for research take account of the need for deception in some studies. When using deception, researchers are required to follow strict guidelines, including debriefing participants at the end of the experiment. Debriefing involves explaining the reasons for conducting the research and clearing up any misunderstandings or concerns on the part of the participant. Debriefing may also involve ensuring the participant leaves the experimental setting in the same mental state as they were in before the experiment. Milgram (1974) reported that his debriefing procedure, involving a friendly reconciliation with the ‘victim', was sufficiently thorough to ensure that each participant left the laboratory ‘in a state of wellbeing'.

In a follow-up study, Milgram, assisted by a psychiatrist, discovered that very few participants felt they were harmed by their experiences. Only 1.3% of participants felt that they were ‘sorry' or ‘very sorry' to have taken part in the experiment, whereas 83.7% were glad to have taken part.

Despite this, some psychologists argue that Milgram's efforts to obtain naïve participants were unethical because the participants were not fully informed and every opportunity was taken to persuade the participant to continue when some were clearly uncertain whether they wished to do so. On the other side of the debate, some psychologists believe that the risks to participants were worth taking in order to investigate a very important aspect of behaviour that has important benefits for society when properly understood (Wren, 1999).
BOX 10.4

Obedience in cults and sects

The terms cult and sect are often used interchangeably because they have some common features. They are, however, different types of groups. A key distinction is in the separateness of the identity of the group.

A cult is a group which claims to have a great devotion to someone, idea or object. A cult usually has a religious basis and there is a living, charismatic and influential leader who is often seen as the ‘guiding spirit’ behind the religious beliefs and practices of the group.

A sect is a group that follows a particular set of principles, beliefs and practices and which has a separate identity within a larger group or organisation. A sect is generally a faction (breakaway group) within the larger group and is often not formally recognised by the larger group.

There are many cults and sects throughout the world. Most cults and many sects establish their own set of social norms that are often different from those of the rest of society.

One well-known cult was established in the 1960s by the Reverend Jim Jones. Initially located in Indiana in the United States, Jones relocated his ‘congregation’ to Guyana in South America, where he set up his own community called Jonestown. Jones was extremely influential over his group of loyal followers.

In 1978, the mass media around the world were filled with horrific scenes (below) and stories from Guyana, South America, where ‘close to 1000 people died at Jonestown. Under the direction of the Reverend Jim Jones, the members of Jones’s People’s Temple fed a poison-laced drink to their children, administered the potion to their infants, and drank it themselves. Their bodies were found lying together, arm in arm; 911 perished’ (Aronson, 1988).

FIGURE 10.20 Jonestown massacre, 1978

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.13

Review questions

1. (a) Describe the relationship between social proximity and how obedient someone is likely to be to an order to do something harmful to another person.
   (b) Describe the relationship between the perceived legitimacy of an authority figure and how obedient someone is likely to be to an order to do something harmful to another person.
   (c) In what way can group pressure influence obedience?

2. Draw a diagram showing how social proximity, legitimacy of an authority figure and group pressure influence obedience.

3. Describe three ethical issues raised by Milgram’s experiments on obedience.

4. Explain whether or not the amount of stress to which participants were subjected is justifiable in terms of the importance or benefits of the research itself and its outcomes.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.14

Role play — obedience experiments

Working in small groups, prepare and conduct a five minute TV current affairs report on one of the obedience experiments and what the findings suggest about factors that affect the behaviour of individuals and groups.

Your group’s report should include such aspects as:
• aim(s) or rationale of the experiment; that is, why it was conducted
• key features of the experimental design
• main results obtained

• one or more interview(s); for example, an interview with a participant (‘teacher’) exploring their thoughts and feelings during the experiment, and what influenced their behaviour; an interview with a representative of the Australian Psychological Society on ethical issues relevant to the experiment.

The report may include media techniques for creating interest or controversy but must be substantially factual.
CONFORMITY

At various times in our lives, we all experience group pressure to conform. Conformity is the tendency to adjust one’s thoughts, feelings or behaviour in ways that are in agreement with those of a particular individual or group, or with accepted standards about how a person should behave in certain situations (social norms). For example, conformity occurs when someone does something (e.g., swears) which they do not normally do, to ‘go along’ with the rest of the group (who all swear). Conformity also occurs when we wear a formal evening dress or a suit (rather than jeans) to a deb ball, or stand (rather than sit) when the national anthem is played at a sports event.

Psychologists have conducted many experiments to understand various conditions under which conformity occurs. One of the best known series of experiments on conformity was conducted by Polish-born American psychologist Solomon Asch in the 1950s.

Asch’s experiments on conformity

In several classic experiments, Asch investigated group pressure to conform. In different experiments, Asch studied factors that he believed influenced conformity, such as group size and whether or not the group is unanimous (in complete agreement) on what should be said or done.

In one of the experiments conducted by Asch (1951), the participant came into a room that contained six other people and an experimenter and sat at the end of a long table, in a chair that had been purposely left vacant. Each participant was told they were taking part in a ‘psychological experiment on visual judgment’.

The experimenter then showed two cards to the group. On one card was a single vertical line. On the second card were three vertical lines (see figure 10.23). The participant was asked to select the line from the second card that matched the length of the line on the first card. In total there were 18 trials, each using a different pair of cards. In some of the trials, the difference in the length of the lines was hardly noticeable so the matching line was difficult to identify. In other trials, the three lines were noticeably different.

The participant was not aware that the other people around the table were confederates. The confederates had been instructed to answer correctly for some of the trials and to answer incorrectly for the majority of trials. After hearing the confederates’ answers, the participant had to decide between giving the same answer as the others in the group (i.e., conforming), even though on many trials their answer was obviously incorrect, or giving the answer they believed was correct.

About 75% of the participants agreed with the confederates’ incorrect responses at least once during
the trials. About 33% of the participants agreed with incorrect responses in half or more of the trials. However, 24% of the participants did not conform to the incorrect responses given by the confederates at all. When the participants in Asch’s experiment were questioned later, all reported experiencing some degree of self-doubt about their opinion as to which lines matched up. Those participants who had generally conformed and agreed with the answers the confederates gave, said that they were aware that their responses and the confederates’ were wrong but they went along with the group because they did not want to spoil the experimenter’s results and they did not want to generate disharmony or conflict. Some of the participants who gave the correct response went so far as to apologise for correctly responding. Those participants who did not conform said they felt ‘conspicuous’ and ‘crazy’, like a ‘misfit’ when they gave answers that disagreed with those of the rest of the group.

**FIGURE 10.24** The unsuspecting participant (number six) was asked to make judgments about the length of lines presented to the group, after the other group members had exerted group pressure on him by unanimously selecting the same wrong answer.
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.15

Review questions
1 Define what is meant by the term conformity with reference to an example different from those used in the text.
2 Consider the Asch (1951) experiment.
   (a) Briefly describe the procedure used by Asch to study conformity.
   (b) Is it valid to conclude that participants gave incorrect answers because they experienced group pressure to conform? Explain with reference to the results obtained in the experiment.
   (c) What explanation can you offer for the 24% of the participants in the experiment who did not conform and disagreed with the confederates' incorrect responses during any of the trials?
   (d) Suggest a variation to the procedure that would use an experimental group as well as a control group for comparison purposes.

3 Which of the following factors do you believe would influence conformity in an experiment using Asch's (1951) procedures? Answer without referring to the text.
   • the size of the group
   • whether the group members are unanimous in their views
   • whether the group is viewed as being a valuable source of information
   • awareness of accepted standards about how one should behave (social norms)
   • cultural background of participants
   • whether participants simply don’t ‘try hard’ and just go along with the group
   • whether participants feel ‘anonymous’ in the group situation

4 Asch’s experiment has been criticised by some psychologists as being unethical because of the use of deception. Is the criticism justifiable? Answer with reference to relevant ethical standards.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.16

Reflection
In your opinion, to what extent do the participants’ responses in the Asch experiment reflect what happens in everyday life outside the laboratory?

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.17

Analysis of research by Asch (1951) on conformity
Prepare a flow chart summary of the main features of Asch’s experiment on conformity. Your flow chart should include the following:
1 a possible aim of the experiment
2 a possible research hypothesis
3 who the participants were and how they were selected
4 the experimental conditions and key variables that were tested, stated in operationalised terms
5 the main results obtained
6 the conclusion that was drawn from these results
7 whether the experiment has external validity, with reference to a possible generalisation beyond the sample
8 two main limitations or criticisms of the research method
9 key ethical issues.

Factors affecting conformity
Prior to his experiments, Asch hypothesised that people would not conform in situations where they could clearly see what is correct and what is incorrect. Although most of the university students who were research participants in his experiments did not conform to group pressure that was exerted on them, many did. Asch made his views about this clear: ‘That reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black is a cause of concern’ (Asch, 1955).

Asch’s findings also aroused interest among other psychologists and a great deal of research on conformity followed. On the basis of Asch’s and other research findings, a number of key factors that influence conformity have been proposed. These include:
• the size of the group
• whether or not the group members are unanimous in their views
• whether the group is viewed as being a valuable source of information
• awareness of accepted standards about how one should behave (normative influence)
• cultural background
• social loafing
• anonymity in a group (deindividuation).

Group size
Asch varied group size in his experiments by having 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 or 15 confederates unanimously and falsely state that a comparison line was the same length as the standard line. His results showed that conformity increased with group size, up to a size of four. Beyond a group size of four confederates, conformity did not continue to increase significantly. A group size of 15 actually produced a lower level of conformity than did a group size of three.

Other researchers who tested these findings have obtained similar results. A possible explanation is that as more and more people start to express the same opinion, an individual may suspect that they are behaving like ‘mindless sheep’ and therefore not want to ‘follow in their footsteps’. However, when opinions are the same in a smaller group, an individual may think that each member of the group is behaving independently.
This latter view may be more influential on whether a conforming response is made. Consequently, a belief that one, two or three independent thinkers have reached the same answer may have a more powerful effect than a belief that 14 people are mindlessly ‘doing as the others do’. In sum, group size seems to be an important factor influencing conformity, but probably only up to a point.

\[ \text{Percentage of conforming responses} \]

\[ \text{Group size} \]

**FIGURE 10.25** Conformity increases with group size up to about four, but beyond that, group size tends to have little influence on conformity.

**Unanimity**

Imagine yourself in Asch’s experiment when everyone in the group gives the same answer; but an answer that is different from your answer; that is, there is *unanimity*, or complete agreement, among the other group members as to what the answer is. Would you be willing to disagree with everyone else if you believed that they were all incorrect? The results of Asch’s experiment indicate that it is difficult to be a minority of one, to stand against the group, even when you think you are right and everyone else is wrong.

However, Asch also found that it takes only one person to disagree with the group’s judgment to significantly affect conformity. When he allowed one confederate to answer in the same way as the research participant, the amount of conformity reduced by about 80%.

Experiments by other psychologists who subsequently investigated this *ally effect* have found that when research participants are led to believe that their thoughts, feelings or behaviour are supported, shared or not disagreed with by someone else in their group, even when everyone else in the group agrees with a different view, the presence of the ally leads to a reduction in the level of conformity. The presence of an ally who shares one’s view, or at least doesn’t accept the views of the majority, can be seen as providing social support that strengthens resistance to conformity.

**Informational influence**

In other experiments on conformity, psychologists have found that individuals are more likely to conform to the views of group members when they want to provide a correct response but they are unsure about what the correct response is. For example, suppose that you want to buy a car and have narrowed your preferences down to two cars, a red car and a purple car. They are both about the same price but have some different features. You don’t know much about cars so you seek advice from a friend who does. Your friend checks both cars and recommends that you buy the purple one because it has lower kilometres on the odometer, the tyres are less worn, the registration will take longer to expire and the engine runs more smoothly.

If you accepted your friend’s recommendation, then you would be conforming because information they provided influenced you to make a specific choice. In this case, you were motivated to make the right choice, viewed your friend as a valuable source of information that you lacked, then were guided by the information your friend provided when deciding what to do. *Informational influence* occurs when conformity results from a need for direction and information on how to respond in a specific situation.

Informational influence leads people to accept other people’s views when they are uncertain about what to do. Research studies have specifically found that informational influence is more likely to lead to conformity when participants feel incompetent,
when the task is difficult, or when participants are concerned about being right (Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2008; Myers, 1990). In all these situations, we may be motivated by wanting to be ‘right’ and access to relevant information can influence us to conform.

**Normative influence**

When informational influence leads us to conform, we conform because we want to be right. When normative influence leads us to conform, we conform because we want to be liked and accepted by the group.

**Normative influence** to conform occurs when our response in a group situation is guided by one or more social norms. When we are aware of social norms for a particular situation, awareness of these norms can be a powerful influence on both the likelihood that we will conform and the strength of conformity that occurs.

According to psychologists, this is partly explained by our desire to be liked and accepted by other people, as well as our concern with being rejected by others. We also like to receive praise and approval from others, particularly from those who are important in our lives, such as friends, parents, teachers and employers.

A useful way of meeting these needs for acceptance and approval is to be (or appear to be), as similar to others as possible (Hewstone, Stroebe & Jonas, 2008). From a very young age, at home and at school in particular, we learn that agreeing with other people and behaving as they do when the situation demands it usually brings positive results — people are more likely to like us and accept us, and may even give us praise or approval when we conform.

**Culture**

Asch's experiment using the line-judgment task has been repeated by researchers in many different countries and cultures throughout the world. Sometimes it has been repeated in exactly the same way and at other times it has been repeated with variations; for example, by using patterns rather than lines or participants of different social backgrounds, such as gender, age and educational qualifications.

When British psychologists Rod Bond and Peter Smith (1996) examined the results of 133 of these ‘Asch-type’ experiments that have been conducted in 17 different countries, they found differences in conformity. As shown in table 10.3, conformity occurred less often in studies conducted in North America and Western Europe (e.g., France and Portugal) than in other parts of the world such as Africa, Fiji and Asia (e.g., Hong Kong and Japan).

Bond and Smith believe that the results of their meta-analysis study suggest that there are cultural differences in conformity. The lowest conformity occurred in individualist cultures where achievement of personal goals tends to be placed ahead of achieving group goals. In addition, people who maintain independence and resist group pressure tend to be viewed as strong-minded and regarded more positively than those who conform. Consequently, conformity to incorrect answers given by the group in an Asch-type experiment would tend to be regarded as undesirable and weak.

The highest level of conformity occurred in collectivist cultures where individuals tend to be encouraged, and sometimes expected, to place group goals ahead of their personal goals. These cultures also encourage uniformity (‘everyone being like everyone else’) and values and beliefs that promote conformity and ‘fitting in for the good of the wider community, rather than individuality. Consequently, conformity to incorrect answers given by a group of confederates in an Asch-type experiment would tend to be regarded as appropriate (Bond & Smith, 1996; Smith & Bond, 1998).

**Table 10.3 Results of Asch-type conformity studies across different cultures associated with different countries or regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Number of studies</th>
<th>Averaged effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asch's USA studies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other USA studies</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab samples (Kuwait, Lebanon)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa (Zimbabwe, Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Ghana)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The averaged effect size in the right-hand column is the result of a statistical procedure to allow the results of Asch-type studies to be combined and averaged across different studies. The smaller the effect size, the lower the conformity, and the greater the effect size, the higher the conformity.

FIGURE 10.27 Conformity can be influenced by cultural norms: (a) a collectivist culture such as throughout Japan tends to be more conformist; (b) an individualist culture like the USA tend to be less conformist.

Social loafing

Sometimes the presence of others in a group situation results in reduced performance, especially when the other people are co-workers or team mates. This reduction in the effort of an individual member of the group as a result of the presence of others results in social loafing.

Social loafing refers to the tendency of an individual to make less effort when involved in a group activity than when working alone. It was first systematically studied and observed in a tug-of-war experiment involving two teams of eight people. The results showed that the collective effort exerted by each team did not match the total of the individual efforts. For example, blindfolded participants who were assigned the first position in the tug-of-war machine (see figure 10.28) and told to ‘pull as hard as you can’ pulled 18 per cent harder when they knew they were pulling alone than when they believed that others were also pulling (Ingham et al., 1974).

In the laboratory, social loafing has been observed among people in a variety of situations such as rope-pulling (tug-of-war), shouting and clapping, pumping water or air, writing poems or editorials, producing ideas and typing. However, most of these studies were conducted with American and European participants. Research on social loafing using Chinese participants has found that participants work harder in a group situation than when they work alone. This finding indicates a cultural difference in social loafing (Moghaddam, Taylor & Wright, 1993).

Social loafing can also be observed in everyday life situations. For example, some workers who do not pay for membership of a union are social loafers if they accept the improved benefits for workers achieved by the union.

Generally, social loafers conform to their group, but with less effort. This is based on their belief that conforming
(or not conforming) will not make much of a difference in what the group decides (or does), so they just go along with whatever the group agrees to do (or does).

The influence of social loafing on conformity can depend on many different factors. Experimental research findings indicate that people are less likely to ‘loaf’in groups when the group consists of friends rather than strangers, but this depends on the extent to which the group’s decision or behaviour is of importance to the individual. For example, an individual is less likely to conform through social loafing when they view their group’s outcome as important, challenging or appealing.

American psychologists Steven Karau and Kipling Williams (1993) analysed the results of 78 research studies on social loafing and found that social loafing is less likely to influence conformity, if at all, when:

- maximum effort from everyone in the group is essential for the group’s goal to be attained
- the group is valued by its members (for example, the group is made up of close friends)
- the task is important, challenging or appealing to those performing it
- the group is small
- members of a group believe that it is possible for their individual performance to be judged in some way
- other group members are not expected to perform well so social loafing might lead to failure on the task
- those working on the task are women rather than men.

Deindividuation

A group can sometimes have a negative influence on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of its members. In particular, when in a very large group or a ‘faceless crowd’, people sometimes shed their normal inhibitions and conform to the group by participating in acts of aggression and other types of anti-social behaviour in which they would normally not engage. Such changes in thinking, feeling and behaving that occur in a large group have been explained by deindividuation.

Deindividuation is the loss of individuality, or the sense of anonymity, that can occur in a group situation. Deindividuation is a psychological state and
is believed to be an important factor in explaining the extreme behaviour of some people in crowds, particularly in situations where high levels of emotion are involved; for example, screaming hysterically during a rock concert or abusing a football umpire, as well as less restrained mob behaviour, street riots and the violence observed in some English and European soccer fans.

Research studies have identified two important factors that bring about deindividuation which results in conformity to a group. These factors are anonymity and a shift in attention.

**Anonymity in a group**

In groups, when people feel anonymous or ‘invisible’, and less accountable for their actions, they may choose to conform to a group which is behaving in ways they otherwise would not. Furthermore, being part of a large crowd or being unrecognisable through some sort of disguise, such as a uniform or fancy dress, can lead people to conform to a group by doing things they ordinarily would not even think about.

For example, a jeering crowd protects the aggressive individual football fan from taking responsibility for threatening an umpire because ‘everyone else is doing it too’. And rioters who become anonymous in a mob may loot other people’s property, as is witnessed during periods of civil unrest or war. In a large group situation or crowd, people believe they can get away with such anti-social behaviour because they cannot easily be distinguished from others who are behaving in the same way.

In these situations, group members do not pass judgment on an individual’s behaviour because they are all ‘doing it’. To pass judgment would be to also condemn one’s own behaviour. Therefore, the behaviour continues because group members blame the situation they are in, rather than taking the responsibility for their own decisions and behaviour.

Generally, the bigger the group, the greater the anonymity and the more likely it is that group members will use this anonymity to behave in ways they usually would not. In one experiment, Zimbardo (1970) dressed adult females in identical white coats and hoods so they were individually anonymous and resembled members of the racist group known as the Ku Klux Klan (see figure 10.31). Zimbardo found that female participants disguised with masks, and therefore deindividuated, were more likely to conform to a request to give high-voltage electric shocks to a helpless female than those without masks who were easily identifiable and not deindividuated.

**Shift in attention**

When individuals are with others in a group, their attention is often focused on the activities of the group and events in the environment; that is, events ‘external’ to the individual (Lord, 1997). This results in fewer opportunities to focus on ‘internal’ thoughts. Consequently, individuals in a group are less likely to reflect on the appropriateness of their actions, and will therefore give less thought to the consequences of their behaviour (Diener, 1980).

As a result, people are more likely to act impulsively and conform to a group or situation. This is intensified when group members act ‘as one’, such as by wearing uniforms, singing or chanting together. The heightened emotions that accompany the group behaviour make it difficult to stop (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1999).
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.18

Review questions
1 Name and briefly describe each of the key factors that influence conformity, with reference to relevant examples and research findings.
2 If you completed question 3 in learning activity 10.15, check your answers. Which of the factors did you believe would influence conformity? Does this suggest ‘common sense’ is adequate in science? Briefly explain your answer.
3 Name the factor that influences conformity in each of the following situations.
   (a) Olivia doesn’t know which of three outfits she could buy for the upcoming deb ball is the ‘best one’ so she accepts the advice of her older sister on which outfit to buy.
   (b) Jake doesn’t actually enjoy drinking in hotels but he still goes to the local hotel with his workmates on Fridays because ‘everyone else wants to go’.
   (c) Sujintha doesn’t usually worry about ‘good manners’ when eating at home with his family but is well-mannered when eating out with his family in a restaurant.
   (d) Voula is normally shy but joins in a Mexican wave at the MCG during the Boxing Day test cricket match.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.19

Media response — suicide bomber
Consider the photo of 15-year-old Rania shown at right.

Rania is chained to window bars as Iraqi police remove her vest loaded with explosives. The police believed that she was a suicide bomber, but her explosives failed to detonate. Their investigation revealed that her father was a suicide bomber for the al-Qaida terrorist organisation in Iraq and her mother was an ‘emira’ — a princess or leader in the al-Qaida organisation.

1 Explain Rania’s behaviour with reference to factors that influence conformity.
2 Give a possible explanation(s) of Rania’s behaviour in terms of obedience and a combination of conformity and obedience.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.20

Concept map on factors influencing conformity
Prepare a concept map showing the key factors that influence conformity and possible relationships between the different factors.

Consider constructing your concept map around a centrally placed example, such as ‘conformity in a queue for concert tickets’ or ‘conformity in the school yard’.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.21

Reflection
Comment on the ethical acceptability of conformity studies such as those conducted by Asch, especially the justification for deception.
**INFLUENCES ON HELPING BEHAVIOUR**

Voluntary helping behaviour for no apparent personal reward is common in everyday life in Australia. People offer directions, collect money for charities and fund-raising appeals, deliver food and clothing to people in need, feed a neighbour’s cat when they go on holidays, listen to a friend’s problems, mow the lawns of the local school and volunteer their personal time and labour to others in many different ways. Sometimes, people even risk their own health and safety to help total strangers. For example, consider emergency services personnel and volunteers who willingly search for survivors in unstable buildings and rubble after a natural disaster such as a cyclone or an earthquake. Similarly, some people give up their own time, money and other resources to go overseas to provide volunteer aid, often in environments that carry risk to their personal wellbeing.

Psychologists refer to everyday acts of helping others, as well as helping that involves personal cost to the helper, as **pro-social behaviour**. True pro-social behaviour is intentional; that is, the helper deliberately tries to provide assistance. Opening the door for someone who has their arms full of parcels is an example of pro-social behaviour. It doesn’t matter whether you voluntarily opened the door or were asked to do it — the intention was to help someone.

If the outcome of behaviour benefits someone, but there was no intention to help, then the behaviour is not considered to be pro-social. For example, suppose that you are driving down a narrow laneway and stop to remove a box that is in the way so you don’t damage your car. You place the box on the footpath out of your way and drive off. This action will also benefit other motorists who use the laneway. **However, your behaviour is not considered to be pro-social** because it was not your intention to benefit other motorists.

In the 1960s and 1970s, numerous research studies were undertaken to identify and better understand factors that influence pro-social behaviour. Many of these studies were prompted by the disturbing case of Kitty (Catherine) Genovese, who was murdered in a New York street in 1964.

At around 3 am, after returning home from her work in a bar, Kitty was attacked by a knife-wielding man as she walked across the road from her car to her apartment. Kitty tried to escape, but her attacker caught her and repeatedly stabbed her. Kitty’s screams of terror and desperate pleas for help such as ‘Oh my God, he stabbed me!’, ‘Please help me!’, ‘Please help me! I’m dying! I’m dying!’ woke 38 of her neighbours. Many switched on their lights and stood at their windows watching for up to 35 minutes as Kitty struggled with and tried to escape her attacker. Her attacker eventually fled, but only after he had left Kitty to die on the footpath. By most reports, only one of Kitty’s neighbours called the police. No-one went to her aid.

**FIGURE 10.32** Voluntary helping behaviour is pro-social behaviour.

Why did the other 37 people apparently do nothing, particularly those who had worked out that Kitty’s life was clearly in danger? Are there any circumstances under which someone might have intervened to help Kitty?

On the basis of their research findings, psychologists have identified a number of factors that influence the likelihood of pro-social behaviour occurring. These factors include aspects of the situation in which help is required, social factors involving norms (‘rules’) that inform us about our obligations to help, and personal factors associated with the individual who has the opportunity to help.
Situational factors

Two researchers who were particularly interested in Kitty’s case were American psychologists Bibb Latane and John Darley. In order to understand why so many people failed to help Kitty, they conducted several experiments.

On the basis of their research findings, Latane and Darley (1968) identified three key factors associated with the specific situation that influence whether people will be pro-social and help. These factors involve whether we notice the situation, whether we interpret the situation as one in which help is needed, and whether we are prepared to take responsibility for helping in that situation and consider actually doing something to help. Latane and Darley described these in a series of steps that occur one after the other.

Noticing the situation

If you were walking through a shopping centre with your friends, would you necessarily notice a person who is slumped in front of a store and in need of help? It may be that you are so involved in a conversation with your friends that you do not. Clearly, if you do not notice that there is a situation where help may be required you will not respond in an appropriate pro-social way.

But would you be more likely to notice the person slumped in front of the store if you were walking alone? Research findings indicate that, both in laboratory and real-world (field) experimental settings, when individuals are on their own they are quicker to notice something ‘different’ or ‘unusual’ than when they are in a group. A simple, commonsense explanation is that people in a group are more likely to be focused on their interactions with each other than on their surroundings, as compared with when they are alone.

Interpreting the situation

Many situations in which help may be required are ambiguous or unclear. Therefore, people cannot always be sure that a helping response is appropriate or required. For example, if you saw someone slumped on the steps of a building in the middle of the day, as shown in figure 10.34, would you think they were drunk, injured, ill, upset, affected by an overdose of drugs or simply resting? Any one of these interpretations may be correct.

Noticing an incident that is different or unusual and may involve someone in need of help is a necessary first step in making a helping response. However, this is not enough. Once the incident is noticed, the person must then interpret the situation as one in which help is required.

FIGURE 10.33 (a) Kitty Genovese (b) The street on which Kitty was stabbed to death

FIGURE 10.34 How would you interpret this situation? Is the person ill, upset, suffering from a drug overdose or simply resting? Your answer is likely to influence how you might respond to this situation. You must interpret a situation as one which requires your help. This is the second step in making a helpful response.
Research findings indicate that the less ambiguous the situation, the more likely it is that help will be offered. Conversely, the more ambiguous the situation, the less likely it is that help will be offered. For example, in an experiment conducted by American psychologist Leonard Bickman (1971), female participants sitting alone in a cubicle heard a crash and a person's scream, followed by the reaction of a ‘witness’ to the apparent accident. Each participant heard one of three types of reactions:

- the accident described by the witness as a certain emergency
- the accident described as a certain non-emergency
- the accident described with uncertainty about whether or not it was an emergency.

When the participants heard the witness interpret the event as a certain emergency, they helped more frequently and more quickly than when the interpretation was uncertain or when the event was identified as a non-emergency.

In another experiment, American psychologists Russell Clark and Larry Word (1972) set up a different emergency situation where there was no ambiguity. In a room adjoining the room in which the participants were located, a ‘maintenance worker’ who was actually a confederate climbed a ladder, fell off it and pulled the ladder over on top of himself. He grunted loudly and exclaimed, ‘Oh my back; I can’t move!’ He continued groaning with each breath, then he gave a cry for help.

In all conditions of the experiment, whether they were alone or with other participants, 100% of the participants went to the aid of the victim.

In a second experiment, Clark and Word (1974) staged the same fall. However, in this follow-up experiment, they added ambiguity by removing the verbal cues that an injury had occurred; that is, the victim did not say anything or groan after the fall. Under these circumstances, only 30% of the participants helped (Vander Zanden, 1981).

To sum up, in order for helping behaviour to occur in response to an emergency situation, a potential helper needs to first notice the situation, then interpret the situation as one in which help is required. The interpretation can be influenced by other people, particularly the way in which others respond to the same situation. If an individual interprets a situation as one in which a helping response is needed, they must then decide whether they will take responsibility for helping.

**Taking responsibility for helping**

Though you may notice and correctly interpret a situation as one in which help is required, you are unlikely to intervene and help unless you believe it is your responsibility to do so. For example, if you were at a swimming pool and saw a swimmer calling for help in full view of the lifeguard, you would be unlikely to jump in the water to provide help. Instead, you would probably decide that helping a swimmer in distress is the responsibility of the lifeguard (Baron & Byrne, 1991).

When someone else is nearby in an emergency situation, we may leave the responsibility to help to them, even if we don’t interpret them as having the responsibility to help. For example, in the Kitty Genovese murder, most of the neighbours who saw Kitty being attacked and heard her pleas for help accurately interpreted the situation as an emergency, but they failed to help her. Seeing lights and silhouetted figures in neighbouring windows would have made Kitty’s neighbours aware that others were also watching.

Darley and Latane (1968) hypothesised that the presence of other onlookers affected each individual’s sense of responsibility to take action. Consequently, no-one helped, in the mistaken belief that someone else would take on the responsibility for helping.

**The bystander effect**

Many experiments were subsequently developed to test this hypothesis about responsibility. In one experiment conducted by Latane and Dabbs (1975), 145 confederates ‘accidentally’ dropped coins or...
pencils while in a lift. In 1497 journeys in the lift, the confederates were helped 40% of the time when they were in the lift with only one other person and less than 20% of the time when there were six other passengers. When asked afterwards why they responded as they did, most of the participants who were the only other passenger in the lift referred to their feelings of a personal responsibility for helping. However, only a very small percentage of participants who were in the lift with one or more others indicated any feelings or beliefs of a personal responsibility to offer help.

The results of this experiment demonstrate what psychologists call the bystander effect. The bystander effect is the tendency for individuals to be less likely to help another person in need when other bystanders are present, or believed to be present, as compared to when they are alone. Furthermore, the greater the number of bystanders, the less likely any one of them is to help. The bystander effect indicates that when we are in a situation where help is needed and we know that others are around, we may place the responsibility to help on them.

FIGURE 10.36 The steps required for helping behaviour to occur

**Would you step in to aid victim of a racist attack?**

By Marissa Calligeros

It’s about 3 o’clock on a Friday afternoon on a crowded city train. Two tradies in high-vis work gear are hurling abuse at three Muslim women wearing headscarves. One tells them not to speak their ‘s---’ in Australia. The other says he’ll ‘f---ing smash’ them.

Had you been there, would you have intervened?

The reason for people’s inaction lies in the ‘bystander effect’, a theory that predicts the more people who are present when someone is in distress, the less likely anyone is to help.

People are often too shocked, too scared, or too indifferent to act when someone else is in trouble, or they think someone else will, the theory suggests.

According to a 2013 VicHealth survey, one in four people do not feel supported enough to speak up or step in when someone else is being racially abused. The ‘bystander effect’ relates to a diffusion of responsibility, said Dr Naomi Priest, leader of the Anti-Racism and Diversity Studies Program at the University of Melbourne.

‘People are more likely to intervene if there are few, or no other witnesses, than if there are lots.’

On Friday, May 15, the train had left Melbourne Central station when the tradies began abusing the women, telling them their headscarves should not be worn in Australia. It was only when the tradies threatened to ‘f---ing smash’ the women, that Jason Cias stepped in.

‘I said to the guy, “Mate, they’re women”,’ Mr Cias said.

He said he was told to mind his own business, before he was punched in the face.

The escalation of violence prompted dozens of other commuters to intervene, said witness Katie Parker, who filmed the incident on her mobile phone.

‘When it appeared to be getting physical, that’s when people started looking for the emergency button,’ she said.

Mr Cias said he understood why others did not step in with him.

‘You hear one terrible story about something being done to someone for stepping in and you assume that’s going to happen to you. You always have to be aware of your safety, but it’s a matter of weighing up your own sense of what’s right.’

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.22

Review questions

1. (a) Define the meaning of helping behaviour.
   (b) A police officer arrives at the scene of a minor car accident during peak hour and immediately takes action to redirect traffic away from the accident. Although the police officer is ‘doing their job’, is their behaviour pro-social? Explain your answer.
   (c) Give an example of a helping behaviour that is pro-social, and which is different from those in the text.
   (d) Give an example of a helping behaviour that probably would not be considered pro-social, and which is different from those in the text. Explain why your example would not be considered pro-social behaviour.

2. (a) Explain the meaning of the term situational factor in relation to the occurrence of pro-social behaviour.
   (b) Briefly describe three features of a situation in which help may be required that may lead an individual to notice that situation.

3. (a) Explain how an individual’s interpretation of an incident can increase the likelihood of their helping.
   (b) State two factors that influence an individual’s interpretation of an incident.
   (c) Identify the operationalised IV and DV(s) in the experiment conducted by Bickman (1971) to investigate interpretation of a situation.

4. (a) What key factor can influence an individual’s decision to take responsibility for helping after noticing and interpreting that help is required?
   (b) Identify the operationalised independent and dependent variables in the experiment conducted by Latane and Dabbs (1975).

5. (a) What is the bystander effect?
   (b) In what way can the presence of others affect our taking responsibility for helping?

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.23

Media response

Read the newspaper article on page 421, about helping a victim of a racist attack, and answer the following questions.

1. How accurate is the description of the bystander effect?
2. Does the bystander effect explain reluctance to help by most of the passengers who witnessed the incident? What other factors may be relevant?

Social factors

Often we help others because we believe that we ought to help; for example, we ought to return a lost wallet that we find and we ought to help a new student find their way to a classroom. In such cases, our desire to help is influenced by social norms.

Social norms are standards that govern what people should or should not do in different social situations (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Although social norms are often not written down or explicitly stated, they are known ways of behaving in particular social groups or cultures, or society in general.

We learn about the social norms for our culture or wider society by observing what other people say and do. In most cultures and societies, there is a norm which specifies that to be selfish is wrong and to be helpful is right. Furthermore, in most cultures and societies it is expected that we do what we can to help other people (Malim, 1997). Two social norms that can influence us to help are the reciprocity norm and the social responsibility norm.

Reciprocity norm

The reciprocity norm is based on the reciprocity principle, an unwritten rule that we should give what we receive or expect to receive. The word ‘reciprocal’ means to give mutually and the saying ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ reflects the reciprocity principle.

In accordance with the reciprocity principle, the reciprocity norm prescribes that we should help others who help us. For example, if you help a friend with their maths homework, you would expect them to return the favour and assist you with another subject when you need help. This expectation is both reasonable and socially acceptable. To receive without giving in return goes against or breaks the reciprocity norm. This is especially the case if the initial help is given voluntarily and involves some sacrifice (Gross & Latane, 1974).

For a variety of reasons, some people are unable to reciprocate when they have been helped. For example, children, elderly people and disabled people are often unable to give as much help as they receive. In such cases, the social responsibility norm influences us to help.

Social responsibility norm

The social responsibility norm prescribes that we should help those who need help because it is our responsibility or duty to do so. For example, if you stop to assist someone who asks for directions, give up your seat on a bus to someone on crutches or help a lost child find their parents on a crowded beach, your helping behaviour is likely to have been influenced by the social responsibility norm.
As a member of a community and wider society, we learn and are led to believe that it is our duty or responsibility to help those in need, without any expectation that this help will be reciprocated (or returned or rewarded).

It seems, however, that we are selective in the way we apply the social responsibility norm. For example, if someone needs assistance because they are a victim of circumstances such as fire, flood or burglary, and they have not been responsible for bringing about their hardship, then we are more likely to help and be generous in our help (Meyer & Mulherin, 1980).

This is demonstrated by the generosity of the Australian public with their donations to support victims of natural disasters that seem to occur annually throughout the country, such as bushfires in the south and floods in the north. People directly affected by these events are perceived by the public as being victims of circumstances outside their control. Consequently, the social responsibility norm is a significant influence in motivating this type of helping behaviour.

If, however, we believe that someone in need of assistance is in some way responsible for bringing about their own problems, for example, by their laziness or poor judgment, then we are less likely to help them or we are unlikely to help them as much as we could. We tend to justify this by reasoning that ‘they are in need of assistance because of problems they created themselves’.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.24**

**Review questions**

1. (a) What are social norms?
   (b) What is the social norm for helping in Australian society?

2. (a) Define the reciprocity norm in relation to helping, using an example different from those in the text.
   (b) Give two examples of when someone might ignore the reciprocity norm to help.

3. (a) Define the social responsibility norm in relation to helping, using an example different from those in the text.
   (b) Under what circumstances might someone ignore the social responsibility norm to help?

4. For each of the following examples of helping, identify whether the reciprocity norm or social responsibility norm is more likely to be involved:
   (a) helping a friend choose an outfit for a school formal
   (b) collecting money for the Royal Children’s Hospital Good Friday Appeal
   (c) helping a visually impaired person to find the door button or handle in a train carriage
   (d) buying raffle tickets for someone’s sporting team hoping that they might subsequently buy raffle tickets from you
   (e) buying chocolates for a school fund-raising appeal after realising that you are hungry.

**Personal factors**

Every year, many Australians are recognised for their helpful contributions to the community beyond what might ordinarily be expected, by being named as a recipient of an Australia Day honour. Some people also receive bravery awards for risking their lives through acts of heroic helping. Do these people have specific personal characteristics that make them more likely to help others?

While research on this topic has been limited, there is empirical evidence that suggests various personal factors can influence pro-social behaviour demonstrated through helping. Such factors include our ability to empathise with others, the mood we are in when help is needed and whether we feel competent to give the help that is required.

**Empathy**

We are more likely to help someone in need of help if we feel empathy for them. **Empathy** is the ability to identify with and understand another person’s feelings or difficulties. Empathic people tend to feel the distress of others, feel concern for them, and can imagine what it must be like to be in need of help. When we empathise with someone, we usually want their suffering to end and this can be a powerful motive for us to help in some way (Batson, 1991, 1995).
Research findings indicate that, in an emergency situation where people appear to be in distress, the more distressed and upset bystanders become from observing the distress experienced by others, the more likely they are to provide help (Dovidio, 1984; Schroeder et al., 1995).

American psychologist Daniel Batson has conducted many experiments on the influence of empathy on helping behaviour. In one experiment, Batson and his colleagues (1997) asked 40 male and female university students who volunteered to be participants to listen to a pre-recorded interview with a female student.

In the interview, the student described how both of her parents had been killed in a car accident and that she now had the responsibility of caring for her younger brother and sister. She wanted to remain at university, but because she had no money, she was considering either leaving university or having her siblings adopted.

Before hearing the story, half of the participants in the experiment received background information about the female student designed to promote empathy for her. The other half of the participants were not given any background information on the female student.

Later, all the participants were asked if they would help raise money to assist her. Batson and his colleagues were interested in whether the participants who heard the empathy-promoting background information would be more likely to help than those who had not heard it.

As shown in figure 10.40, the results showed that those participants who heard the empathy-promoting background information offered to help more than those who had not heard this information (Batson et al., 1997).
Batson (1995) believes that empathic people may help others in distress for egoistic or ‘selfish’ motives, as well as purely helpful, ‘selfless’ motives (which he calls altruistic). For example, when we feel distressed about someone else’s distress, we are motivated to do something to relieve or ‘get rid of’ our own unpleasant feelings of distress. One way of doing this is to help the distressed person. In some cases, people may deal with their distress in another way. They get rid of their unpleasant feelings by leaving the distressing situation. However, Batson (1981) has also conducted research which found that ‘out of sight’ does not necessarily mean ‘out of mind’. When empathic concern is high, most people will help regardless of how easy it is to leave the situation.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.25**

**Analysis of research by Batson et al. (1997) on empathy**

Prepare a flow chart to summarise the experiment on empathy conducted by Daniel Batson and his colleagues (1997).

The flow chart should include the key features of the experiment and the procedures involved, presented in a logical sequence — for example, an aim, a possible research hypothesis, the operationalised IV, the DV(s), the experimental and control groups, results, a conclusion and ethical considerations in conducting the experiment.

**Mood**

Are we more likely to help someone if we are in a good mood or a bad mood? For example, do you believe that you would be more likely to help someone just after finding out that you achieved an A+ for an important exam? What if you just had a huge fight with your best friend? Would you be more or less likely to help a stranger who asked for your assistance at that time?

Commonsense suggests that we will be more likely to help when in a good mood and less likely to help when in a bad mood. Generally, the results of research studies also indicate that a good mood increases helping, whereas a bad mood will sometimes increase and sometimes decrease helping behaviour.

Many studies have found that people are more likely to help when they are feeling good. These studies typically create a mood-lifting experience for participants, such as finding money, imagining a holiday in Hawaii, being successful on a specific task or reading pleasant, positive statements about themselves. The researchers then observe whether or not participants demonstrate helping behaviour when given the opportunity to help.

In one experiment, a researcher made a phone call to 42 people who, in the previous 20 minutes had been given a free gift of stationery by a research assistant who went from door to door. The researcher pretended that she had dialled a wrong number and asked each recipient of the gift to pass on a message as she had used the last of her money.

The results indicated that the preparedness of people to pass on a phone message increased to around 95% during the five-minute period immediately after they received the gift. However, the effect of the good mood gradually wore off, and by 20 minutes after receiving the stationery, the experimental group did not differ from the control group. Of the control group (those who did not receive a free gift), only 10% were prepared to help by passing on a message (Isen, Clark & Schwartz, 1976).

Generally, happy people are helpful people, irrespective of what has caused the good mood (Salovey, Mayer & Rosenhan, 1991). However, the good mood effect on helping tends not to last very long (Isen, Clarke & Schwartz, 1976).
Because helping makes us feel good, people sometimes help in order to stay in a good mood. People may also help in order to escape from a bad mood. Consequently, people who feel guilty are often helpful people.

For example, suppose that an acquaintance from school invites you to their holiday house for the weekend. You know this person has very few friends so you agree to go. However, on Friday afternoon you are invited to a party where all of your close friends will be. You text message your acquaintance with the excuse that your father has been taken to hospital so you cannot go away. You go to the party, and while you are out, your acquaintance rings your house to ask how your father is. Your father answers the phone and tells your acquaintance that he is perfectly well and that he has not been in hospital. When you find out what has happened, you are guilt-ridden and do not know how you will face this person at school on Monday.

Research findings have consistently found that many people will do whatever they need to in order to rid themselves of their guilt and restore positive feelings about themselves. For example, they may try to deal with their guilt by confessing, making negative comments about a person who made them feel guilty or they may repay the bad deed that caused guilt with a good deed.

When given a chance to help a person to whom they had just lied, participants in one research study offered to help for a mean time of 63 minutes, compared with a mean time of two minutes by participants who had not lied and therefore felt no guilt. Our apparent eagerness to make up for a wrongdoing may reflect both the need to reduce our private guilt and the desire to restore the view others have of us.

Psychologists believe that the positive influence of mood on helping behaviour results from a number of interrelated factors. Helping can soften a bad mood and maintain or promote a good mood. For example, a good mood, which usually develops from positive experiences such as receiving a gift or winning something, brings about positive thoughts. In turn, positive thoughts enable us to feel good about ourselves, and feeling good about ourselves makes us more likely to help others (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2008).

### Competence

Suppose that you are holidaying beside the Murray River and observe a swimmer in the middle of the river calling out for help as they are swept downstream. You have noticed the situation, have correctly interpreted it as one in which help is required and have also accepted responsibility for helping. You quickly look around and realise that there is no-one else around. Would you help by diving into the river and trying to reach the person in distress?

If you did not know how to swim, you would be extremely unlikely to do this. You would probably realise that diving into a river to rescue someone if you are not a strong swimmer could lead to your own drowning as well as that of the other person. If, however, you were a strong swimmer and had been trained in lifesaving skills, you would be much more likely to help, even if other bystanders were present (Baron & Byrne, 1991).

Clearly, we can't help someone if we do not have the skills required or do not know how. Consequently, our actual or perceived ability to help can influence whether or not we help in a specific situation, as well as the type of help we may offer. In the example described previously, if you were not a competent swimmer, you might not dive into the river, but you may try to help by calling for or running to find someone else who could.

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**Figure 10.42** The effects of mood on helping. A good mood usually increases the likelihood of helping, whereas a bad mood can either increase or decrease the likelihood of helping.
Research findings indicate that people with abilities or training that are relevant to a situation in which help is required are more likely to help. Furthermore, relevant training makes help not only more likely to be offered, but also more likely to be effective.

For example, in one experiment, researchers staged an emergency in which someone was bleeding. Participants who had Red Cross first aid training were most likely to help the ‘victim’ directly by applying pressure to the wound. Untrained participants were equally likely to help in this obvious emergency, but indirectly; for example, they phoned for an ambulance (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2000).

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.26**

**Review questions**

1. (a) What does research evidence suggest about the relationship between an individual’s level of empathy and their likelihood to help?
   (b) Why are empathetic people more likely to help someone who is in need of help?

2. (a) How does an individual’s mood affect the likelihood of their helping? Ensure that you refer to both good mood and bad mood.
   (b) Name one experiment designed to study good mood and one experiment designed to study bad mood. For each experiment, identify the IV and DV.

3. (a) Explain how an individual’s view of their competence to help in a specific situation can affect the likelihood of their helping.

(b) Construct a diagram similar to that in figure 10.42 to summarise the effect of perceived competence on helping.

4. Rasheen is ‘on a high’ as she has just bought the dress she has been saving for and it was unexpectedly on sale. On her way to the shoe store, she notices a girl about her own age sitting up against a shop window on the footpath with a small sign and a box requesting money.

   Rasheen believes that the girl is probably a ‘street kid’ who may have made some ‘wrong decisions’ in her life, possibly like Rasheen’s childhood friend who turned to drugs when he hooked up with the ‘wrong crowd’.

   How likely is it that Rasheen will drop some money into the girl’s box? Explain with reference to the three key personal factors that can influence helping behaviour.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.27**

**Summary of factors that influence helping**

Complete the table below to summarise key factors that influence the occurrence of helping.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Situational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Noticing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Interpreting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Taking responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Reciprocity norm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Social responsibility norm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Personal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Mood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**BOX 10.5**

**Altruism**

Sometimes, pro-social helping behaviour such as voluntary work for the disabled, donating money to the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal, or participating in the Lort Smith PALS program by taking your dog to visit sick or elderly people is labelled as altruism. Altruism is a specific kind of pro-social behaviour where the motive to help is totally selfless. *Altruism* refers to pro-social behaviour focused on the wellbeing or benefit of others without any thought to personal gain or reward (Batson, 1998).

Suppose, for example, that you donate $10 to someone collecting money for homeless street kids. While you are keen to help the street kids, you also want to impress a friend with your generosity and apparent concern for others less fortunate than yourself. Because this behaviour involves an intention to help, it is an example of pro-social behaviour. However, it is not an example of altruism, because altruism involves no personal gain, reward or benefit.

Some psychologists have argued that altruism also differs from ordinary helping behaviour in that it involves an element of personal risk — that an altruistic act is one in which no conscious thought is given to one’s personal wellbeing or interests, even placing the survival of another person ahead of one’s own survival.

Consequently, ‘genuine’ altruism would be demonstrated by a passer-by who, for example, puts themself at risk by running into a blazing house to rescue a stranger trapped inside. If the element of personal risk is added to the definition of altruism, and the person is not taking that risk as a part of their normal job (such as emergency services personnel do), then examples of altruism are relatively rare.

Most psychologists adopt the more conventional definition of altruism referred to previously — that altruism is helping behaviour which is not motivated by personal gain or reward, but does not necessarily involve an element of personal risk. However, there is still considerable debate about whether ‘genuine’ altruism actually exists.

There is some research evidence to suggest that some people may be genuinely altruistic. For example, in one study, people who had the opportunity to walk away without helping from a distressing situation they had observed with others, or who were offered rewards not to help, still chose to help someone in distress (Batson & Moran, 1999).

Daniel Batson (1995), who has also extensively studied altruism, believes that sometimes people are truly altruistic and their focus is solely on the welfare of others with no consideration of themselves. The opposing view proposes that all instances of helpfulness have an underlying selfish explanation, even if it doesn’t seem obvious.

**FIGURE 10.44** This firefighter risked his life to enter a blazing house fire to rescue the child in his arms. Is his behaviour altruistic?
INFLUENCES ON RELUCTANCE TO HELP

When so many people failed to help directly or seek help while watching the Kitty Genovese incident, psychologists were interested to discover not only those factors that lead someone to help, but also those factors that prevent someone from helping.

Among the many factors that influence someone to provide help are those to do with the specific situation in which help is required (situational factors) and those to do with the person who has the opportunity to help (personal factors).

These factors can also explain why someone may be reluctant to provide help when help is required. For example, a person obviously will not help if they do not notice a situation in which help is required. Nor will they help if they fail to interpret the situation as one requiring their help or if they do not see themselves as being competent to help. Therefore, understanding the situational and personal factors that lead people to help also reveals the circumstances under which people might not help.

Many other factors have been identified through research studies to explain why people are reluctant to help or do not provide help even when they have the opportunity to do so. Two factors involve social influence — the effects of the real or imagined presence or actions of others.

Diffusion of responsibility

The presence of other people can influence our decision about whether helping is our responsibility or not. People often fail to help when others are around because of the diffusion of responsibility across the whole group. **Diffusion of responsibility** is the belief that, in a situation where help is required and others are present, one or more other people will or should take responsibility for helping.

When other people are present, responsibility is divided up or spread (‘diffused’) across the whole group. This leads each individual to feel less responsible for helping than when alone because they assume that someone else will take on the responsibility of helping. Thus, diffusion of responsibility helps explain why no-one helps when many people are present in a situation where help is required.

The fact that there are a lot of other people around actually decreases the likelihood that any one person will help (Aronson, 2008). In the Genovese murder, the responsibility for helping may have diffused across all 38 neighbours who witnessed the event. Ultimately, responsibility diffused to the level where only one person felt any personal responsibility to act.

**FIGURE 10.45** The more people around when help is required, the less likely it is that an individual will help.
Research on failure to help due to diffusion of responsibility

An experiment conducted by Darley and Latane (1968) examined diffusion of responsibility as an explanation of the failure to help in the presence of others. Seventy-two university students (59 female, 13 male) participated in the experiment. Participants were placed alone in separate rooms but were able to communicate with each other via an intercom. Thus, the participants could hear but not see one another.

The experimenters then staged a simulated (fake) epileptic fit by playing a tape recording of a person having a seizure. Participants were led to believe that the person having the epileptic seizure was in an adjoining room.

Three experimental conditions were compared:
- Condition 1: each participant was led to believe that they were the only one whose intercom was tuned in during the seizure. That is, the participant was alone with the victim (in a two-person group).
- Condition 2: participants were led to believe that two others were also tuned in (a three-person group).
- Condition 3: each participant was led to believe that five others were tuned in (a six-person group).

As shown in figure 10.46(a), participants who believed they were the only ones who could hear the victim, and therefore believed that they had complete responsibility for helping the person, were more likely to attempt to help in some way. Those who believed that other people also heard the victim were less likely to help. The more people believed to be available to help and therefore sharing the responsibility to help with others, the less likely any individual was to help.

In addition, as shown in figure 10.46(b), those who did attempt to help waited longer to do so as the number of people who heard the victim increased. Help was measured by recording the time from the beginning of the seizure until the participant left their room to help in some way. If no participant attempted to help, the experimenters waited six minutes before ending the experiment.

Afterwards, all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on their thoughts and feelings during the emergency, as well as tests designed to measure personal characteristics such as sociability and social responsibility. Furthermore, all participants were debriefed and given support to deal with any stress or negative emotions they might have experienced during the experiment.

![Graph](image)

**FIGURE 10.46** Results of Darley and Latane’s 1968 experiment

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.28

#### Review questions

1. (a) Define diffusion of responsibility, with reference to a situation in which help is needed.
   (b) Explain how diffusion of responsibility can influence someone to not help when help is needed.

2. Explain each of the following situations in terms of diffusion of responsibility.

(a) A local primary school sends out a notice asking parents to volunteer for a ‘working bee’. Most parents receive the notice but no-one turns up for the working bee.

(b) In a firing squad, one of the shooters is randomly assigned a gun or rifle containing a blank bullet. All shooters fire their weapon simultaneously but no individual shooter knows whether they fired the fatal shot.
**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.29**

**Analysis of data from research on diffusion of responsibility**

Read the research in box 10.6. Consider the procedure used by Darley and Latane (1968) to study diffusion of responsibility and the variables which were tested, and then complete the following tasks.

1 In relation to figure 10.46(a), describe the relationship between the percentage of people who attempted to help and the number of other people believed to be available to help.

2 Based on the results shown in figure 10.46(b), what conclusion can be drawn about the time taken to help when one or more others are believed to be available to help?

3 Explain what the results indicate about the cause–effect relationship between the variables that were tested.

4 What conclusion can be drawn about diffusion of responsibility?

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**Audience inhibition**

As well as diffusing responsibility for helping to the point that no-one helps, the presence of other people can influence people not to help in other ways.

People may stand back and not do anything to help because they don’t want to embarrass themselves or feel foolish, especially if it turns out that help is not actually needed or there is no emergency.

The presence of others at the scene provides an audience and this increases the chance of being embarrassed or feeling foolish. Consequently, these aspects of the situation can inhibit, or prevent, someone from helping.

This reason for failing to help is called audience inhibition — not helping another person because of a fear of appearing foolish in the presence of others. Audience inhibition typically leads bystanders to keep calm in an emergency and check to see how others present are reacting. The problem is that if people observe that everyone else is keeping calm they will conclude that no-one else is concerned or upset and therefore help is not needed (Smith & Mackie, 2000).

This explanation of the reluctance of anyone to help when given the opportunity to help was also tested by Latane and Darley in what has become known as the ‘smoke-filled room experiment’.

**The ‘smoke-filled room’ experiment**

Latane and Darley (1968) used 60 male university students as participants. All were asked to complete a questionnaire in a small room that had a one-way mirror for observation purposes. Each participant was either alone in the room or in the same room with two other people.

The experiment had three conditions that differed by number and type of people who were in the room:

- Condition 1: a participant was in the room alone
- Condition 2: one participant was in the room together with two confederates who had been instructed to not react when help was needed
- Condition 3: a group of three participants were in the room together and all three were ‘true’ participants.

While participants in the three experimental conditions were completing the questionnaire, a staged emergency occurred where smoke was gradually pumped into the room through an air vent in the wall. The smoke was clearly visible and had a faint odour, but was not harmful. The experimenters observed the participants through the one-way mirror for the next six minutes and recorded how much time passed before the smoke was reported. For the entire experimental period or until a participant took action, smoke continued to flow into the room. Enough smoke had flowed into the room after four minutes to obscure vision.

Of the participants who were alone in the room (condition 1), 50% left the room to report the smoke within two minutes and 75% had reported the smoke within 3½ minutes. In contrast, 62% of the participants in the room with two other people (conditions 2 and 3), continued filling out the questionnaire throughout the entire six-minute period, even though the room was completely filled with smoke.

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**FIGURE 10.47** Results from the Latane and Darley (1968) experiment. When alone in a room filling with smoke, participants were more likely to report the smoke than when others were present.

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**Weblink**

- Video on smoke-filled room experiment 2m 7s
- Latane and Darley outline the smoke-filled room experiment 3m 52s
When interviewed after the experiment, many participants reported that when they were in the room with two others, although they were concerned about the smoke initially, they didn’t want to embarrass themselves or appear foolish by looking too anxious, so they tried to remain calm. Furthermore, participants noticed that the others appeared calm and unconcerned about the smoke. This led them to interpret the smoke as harmless, deciding that it was steam or a problem with the air conditioning. Reassured that there was no cause for concern by the lack of an obvious response by the others, each participant ignored the situation and continued completing the questionnaire.

Thus, each participant’s interpretation of the situation was influenced by their perception of the other people’s responses and their audience inhibition. More specifically, each participant’s lack of response influenced other individuals to do nothing. In contrast, when in the smoke-filled room alone, once the individuals noticed the smoke, many hesitated only briefly before investigating its source and reporting it.

Cost–benefit analysis

Suppose you had a close friend with kidney failure who was required to spend a great deal of time in hospital on a dialysis machine to prevent them from dying. A kidney transplant would enable them to resume a normal lifestyle and avoid the regular hospital visits. If they asked you to donate one of your kidneys (assuming you could do so), what would you do?

In making the decision about whether to help, you might weigh up the ‘costs’ of donating (considerations about your own health, risks of an operation, time, disruption to your own life) against those of not donating (guilt, disapproval from others). You may also consider the ‘benefits’ of donating (feeling good about helping someone, time off school), compared with not donating (no interruptions to your own life, no pain or anxiety).

If you went through this process in deciding whether or not to donate a kidney, and therefore to help or not, you would have undertaken a cost–benefit analysis.

A cost–benefit analysis involves an individual weighing up the personal and social costs of helping against the benefits of helping. Benefits of helping are like rewards. For example, depending on the type of help required, they may include an actual monetary reward or rewards such as the gratitude of the victim, help in return (reciprocity), feeling good and an increase in self-esteem, or social approval through the cheers from a crowd of onlookers or the thrill of making the evening news. Costs may include the effort and time required to help, risks such as personal injury, feeling bad (guilt or embarrassment), worsening the situation or loss of resources such as damaged clothing and missing an important appointment that may have led to a job.

While we probably do not consciously work through a formal cost–benefit analysis each time we are confronted with a choice about whether to help someone or not, if the anticipated costs of helping outweigh the benefits, we are less likely to help; if not, we are more likely to help.

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**FIGURE 10.48** Sometimes the benefits of helping cannot be anticipated, occur unexpectedly and little cost–benefit analysis is required.

Source: © The New Yorker Collection 1972, Barney Tobey, from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.
Gender and helping behaviour
Commonsense suggests that males are more likely to help females than to help other males and that females are more likely to help other females than males. However, research findings indicate that when it comes to helping others, it is not simply the gender of the helper or the recipient that determines whether help will be given or received. It is the combination of the gender of the helper, the gender of the recipient and the specific situation that determines whether help will be given.

American psychologists Alice Eagly and Maureen Crowley (1986) analysed research studies on helping behaviour that compared the help received by male and female victims. They found significant trends in helping behaviour based on gender.

When the helper was female, female and male victims were equally likely to receive assistance. However, when the helper was male, females were more likely to receive assistance than males, even when the females were strangers.

The type of help that was required also influenced whether help was received. Males were more likely to help a female if the female was alone and perceived as being ‘helpless’ or in ‘distress’; for example, when she was seen to be a victim of circumstances outside her control, such as having a broken-down car or having her handbag stolen.

Some psychologists have suggested that the willingness of male helpers to ‘rescue’ females in need may be motivated by something other than a genuine desire to help and that cost–benefit analysis may more accurately explain why they help. This is consistent with the research finding that men help attractive women more often (Stroufe et al., 1977).

The results of studies on gender and helping need to be considered in the context of our society. Females not only receive more offers of help in certain situations, they also seek help more readily than males. For example, they are twice as likely to seek medical help, welcome help from friends more readily and are more likely to seek counselling. Perhaps help-seeking behaviour is more socially acceptable for females in many cultures within our society than it is for males? Perhaps some males in our society grow up believing it is their role to protect females, hence they are more willing to take on a helping role when the person in need of help is female?

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.30
Review questions
1. (a) Explain the meaning of audience inhibition and how it can make someone reluctant to help.
   (b) Give an example of when you (or someone you know) have experienced audience inhibition.
   (c) What do audience inhibition and diffusion of responsibility have in common when considered as factors that influence people not to help?
2. Describe the results shown in figure 10.47 on page 431.

3. (a) What does cost–benefit analysis mean in relation to helping?
   (b) Describe a cost–benefit analysis that may occur when deciding whether or not to help a friend with their homework.
4. Using a flow chart format or another type of diagram, explain how a cost–benefit analysis can (a) make someone reluctant to help (b) result in helping.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.31
Summary of factors that influence reluctance to help
1. Complete the table below to summarise key factors that influence someone not to help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social influence</td>
<td>(a) Diffusion of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Audience inhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cost–benefit analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Refer to factors that influence someone to help. Which factors could be included in the table above? Give a reason for your choice of each factor.
BULLYING

The problem of bullying has been of considerable research interest in recent years, both in Australia and throughout many other countries. Bullying can occur in any environment, in any culture or society. It may occur at home, in the street, in a playground, at school, in the workplace, in a hospital, in a prison or anywhere else where people are in a group or can interact. A bully may be male or female, an adult, adolescent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or a student, a team mate, the captain or the coach.

Of particular concern to psychologists, educators and the community in general is bullying by students in both primary and secondary schools. Research findings indicate that bullying impacts on the perpetrator, the victim and bystanders.

Young people who bully over time are more likely to engage in ongoing anti-social behaviour and criminality, have issues with substance abuse, demonstrate low academic achievement and be involved in future child and spouse abuse (National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB), 2015a)

Furthermore, students who are victims of bullying are less happy at school than students who are not victims. Victims of bullying also tend to have lower levels of self-esteem and increased feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. These negative feelings can continue outside the school and through to adult life.

Research findings also indicate that bullying can have far-reaching effects within a school. Bullying can create a climate of tension and intimidation in which students feel threatened and unsafe. Victims of bullying usually spend a great deal of time feeling anxious and worried. These feelings of anxiety and worry can spread across a year level or the entire school. Those who are not victims and see someone being bullied or know that it is happening at school can become distressed, often thinking that they may become victims too.

What is bullying?

Bullying has been defined in many different ways but there are some key elements common to all these definitions. They all suggest that bullying is a type of aggressive behaviour that involves the inappropriate use of power over another less powerful person or group, and is generally repeated over time. More specifically, bullying is repeated physical or psychological aggressive behaviour by a person or group directed towards a less powerful person or group that is intended to cause harm, distress or fear.

When bullying occurs, there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one who is unable to defend themselves adequately. This power imbalance is sometimes very obvious, such as when a bigger and stronger person bullies a much smaller, weaker one, or when a group of people bully an individual. However, bullying can often be much less obvious, such as when the difference in power is psychological (Rigby 2014). For example, knowing something about someone who desperately doesn't want this information known by anyone else can be a source of psychological power for the person who knows the information over the person who doesn't want anyone else to know.

FIGURE 10.50 Bullying may be physical or psychological in nature.
Bullying is also intentional or premeditated. It is a planned ‘attack’ on someone, in either a physical or a psychological way. Finally, bullying involves acts that are usually repeated over time. This means that it is a persistent behaviour that generally involves acts that occur more than ‘once or twice’. For example, consider someone who hits or verbally abuses someone else in self-defence, or who suddenly flares up and retaliates after being provoked. Are these behaviours bullying? Consider also the assistant at a childcare centre who excludes an infant from an activity because they believe that the activity is dangerous for a child so young. Is this bullying? These behaviours would not be considered bullying because bullying is behaviour intended to hurt or cause harm that occurs repeatedly across a period of time.

There are many different types of bullying, which are often interrelated. The Australian National Centre Against Bullying has defined four types of bullying — physical bullying, verbal bullying, covert or hidden bullying and cyberbullying. This organisation advises and informs the Australian community about childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities. Its membership comprises some of Australia’s leading experts in the field of bullying and cyberbullying, including psychologists, academics, researchers and educators.

According to the National Centre Against Bullying (2015b), there are four types of bullying.

**Physical bullying**
Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging property.

**Verbal bullying**
Verbal bullying includes name calling, insults, teasing, threatening, intimidating, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.

**Covert bullying**
Covert bullying is often harder to recognise and can be carried out behind the bullied person’s back. It is called covert because it is ‘hidden’, out of sight of, or unacknowledged and/or unaddressed by adults. This type of bullying is designed to harm someone’s social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Covert bullying includes:
- lying and spreading rumours
- negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks
- playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- mimicking unkindly
- encouraging others to socially exclude someone
- damaging someone’s social reputation or social acceptance.

**Cyberbullying**
Cyberbullying is carried out using digital technologies, including hardware such as computers and smartphones and software such as social media, instant messaging, texts, websites and other. Cyberbullying can happen at any time. It can be in public or in private and sometimes only known to the target and the person bullying. According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2015a), cyberbullying includes:
- **pranking:** repeated hang-ups, anonymous, mocking or threatening phone calls
- **image sharing:** forwarding or sharing unflattering or private images without permission
- **text and email:** sending insulting or threatening text messages or emails
- **personal online information:** publishing online someone’s private, personal or embarrassing information without permission, or spreading rumours online
- **identity theft:** assuming someone’s identity online and negatively representing them in a way that damages their reputation or relationships
- **hate sites:** creating hate sites or implementing social exclusion campaigns on social networking sites.

It is also cyberbullying when one or more people use technology to run a multi-step campaign to bully someone else (or a group); for example, setting another student up to be assaulted, video-recording their humiliation, posting the video-recording online and then sending the website address to others.

**Cyberbullying vs bullying**
One major Australian study found that 463,000 Australian children were victims of cyberbullying in 2013, and almost three-quarters were aged between 10 and 15 years. In addition, a vast majority of Australian schools reported dealing with at least one cyberbullying case in 2012 and, on average, high schools dealt with 22 incidents of cyberbullying in 2013 alone, with one in three of those cases serious enough they were referred to police (Spears et al., 2014).

While cyberbullying is similar to bullying in some ways, there are also differences. According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2015a):
- **Cyberbullying is invasive.** Cyberbullying can be difficult to escape and is incredibly invasive. It is more likely to occur outside of school, including while at home, and can happen at any time.
- **Cyberbullying can involve a large audience.** Cyberbullying can involve harmful material being widely and rapidly shared with a large audience; for example, rumours and images can be posted on public forums or sent to many people at once. This material can also continue to be available and harmful long after the cyberbullying has ceased.
- **Cyberbullies have a sense of anonymity.** Cyberbullying can provide the bully with a sense of relative anonymity and distance from the target, so there is a lack of immediate feedback or consequences.

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*Weblink*
Australian government Cybersmart site
Bullying in Australian schools

Bullying is a serious problem in schools within all types of cultures throughout the world. Based upon self-reports of school children aged 11 to 15 years from 35 countries, one recent study found that 10.9% were being bullied two or three times a month or more (Rigby, 2015).

Bullying is even more prevalent in Australian schools. About one in four report having been bullied at some time during their schooling and at least that many are being bullied on a regular basis. One major Australian study found that being bullied every few weeks or more often (considered to be frequent) overtly and/or covertly is a fairly common experience, affecting approximately one in four year 4 to year 9 Australian students (27%) (Cross et al., 2009).

Although bullying occurs in both primary and secondary schools, it tends to peak in the latter years of primary school and the early years of secondary school. For example, frequent school bullying has been found to be highest among year 5 (32%) and year 8 (29%) students. Generally, hurtful teasing is the most prevalent of all bullying behaviours experienced by students, followed by having hurtful lies told about them (Cross et al., 2009). In addition, boys tend to be victims more than girls and they tend to bully more than girls (Healey, Dowson & Nelson, 2006).

The majority of students (61%) who report having been bullied in any way had also experienced covert bullying (either on its own or in conjunction with overt bullying). Of students who had experienced covert bullying, 60% had also been teased in ‘nasty’ ways, 24% had been physically hurt, and 13% had been sent nasty messages on the internet. Slightly over half (53%) of students who said that they bullied others had engaged in covert bullying (either on its own or in conjunction with overt bullying) (Cross et al., 2009).

When asked qualitatively why some students bully, most believed it was because the person bullying didn’t like the person they were bullying; found bullying fun; enjoyed bullying others; and liked to feel tough and strong, in control and popular (Cross et al., 2009).

Primary schools

In one study of bullying amongst year 6 students in a Melbourne primary school, the researchers found that 45% of the students reported being seriously bullied at school (Fuller et al., 1997). The most common types of bullying experienced, in order of their occurrence, were:

1. being teased or called names
2. being hit, punched or kicked
3. comments about appearance
4. being left out of things on purpose.

The worst time for bullying in the primary school was lunchtime, when few teachers are present or visible for a long period of time. Morning recess and before and after school were also times when bullying was more likely to occur.

The researchers also found that once a primary school student was a target for bullying, the student remained a target for some time. For instance, 26.7% of the students in the sample reported that they had been bullied for longer than one month and 17% reported that they had been a victim of bullying that had lasted for more than six months.

Secondary schools

In another study on bullying among year 8 students from a number of Australian schools, the researchers found that 44% of the students reported having been seriously bullied at school (Healey, Dowson & Nelson, 2006). The most common types of bullying, in order of their occurrence, were:

1. being teased or called names (44%)
2. having rumours spread (21%)
3. being left out of things on purpose (14.5%)
4. being physically threatened or attacked (12.5%).

Research has also found that the worst time for bullying in the secondary school was during lunchtime, followed by before and after school, then on public transport while travelling to or from school.

While there has been some reduction in the incidence of bullying in the past few years due to greater awareness and anti-bullying programs in schools, a great deal still remains to be done to control, let alone stop, bullying in Australian schools.
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.32

Review questions

1. What is bullying?
2. Briefly describe three key characteristics that distinguish bullying from other forms of aggressive behaviour.
3. Complete the following table to summarise the type of bullying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of bullying</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical bullying</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal bullying</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Covert bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying</td>
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</table>

4. Compare and contrast bullying (physical, verbal and covert) and cyberbullying with reference to three similarities and three differences.

5. Which of the following examples involves bullying (including cyberbullying)? Give a reason for each answer.
   a. A school captain keeps giving a younger student a ‘hard time’ because the younger student keeps spoiling other students’ games.
   b. A teacher is fed up with a student who continually misbehaves, so the teacher decides to mimic the student in front of the rest of the class whenever the student misbehaves.
   c. A sibling keeps ‘giving cheek’ to her older sister whenever her sister’s boyfriend comes over.
   d. A year 8 girl is tired of being given a ‘hard time’ by a year 8 boy and decides to retaliate by giving him a ‘hard time’ whenever the opportunity arises.
   e. A girl turns around and whacks the girl behind her who pulled her hair.
   f. A child is hit by another child, runs home and reports it to his dad. His dad immediately goes outside, corners the offending child and speaks angrily for several minutes to the child who did the hitting.
   g. Two friends have an argument, then one text messages the other via their mobile, ‘You are a bad person and everybody hates you’.
   h. Two friends decide they no longer want to have a third person as part of their friendship group so they suggest that the person should join another group.

Effects of bullying on individuals

Bullying can seriously affect physical, social and psychological health. Children, adolescents and adults who are bullied may suffer from short-term and long-term consequences due to being bullied. Common physical consequences of bullying include fatigue, disturbed sleep, shaky hands and loss of appetite. Psychologically, bullied children and adolescents tend to become more withdrawn than normal while complaining about their lack of desire to go to school, work or see friends. Victims of all ages have an increased risk of depression and substance abuse. In extreme cases, victims can lash out violently. In addition, bullying victims tend to have a higher risk of self-harm and suicide (Hertz, Donato & Wright, 2013; NCAB, 2015a).

The severity of impact depends on the type and nature of the bullying, the bully, the reasons for bullying and personal characteristics of the victim, such as their family environment, their mental health condition, whether they have a disability and whether they belong to a minority group for which isolation or lack of community support is an issue.

According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2015b) which has collated research findings on the effects of bullying in schools, students who are bullied are more likely to experience psychological effects such as:

- displaying emotional problems that indicate feelings of vulnerability and low levels of resilience
- being less well accepted by peers, avoiding conflict and being socially withdrawn
- having low self-esteem
- difficulties concentrating, learning and with motivation for schoolwork and school attendance
- disturbed sleep, such as insomnia and nightmares
- experiencing anxiety and/or depression.

![Figure 10.51](image-url)

**Figure 10.51** Students who are bullied at school often feel lonely and isolated.
BOX 10.9

Signs of being bullied
No one should have to put up with bullying. It can make people feel unsafe at school and miserable when they get home.

**Emotional and behavioural signs**
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in eating patterns
- Frequent tears or anger
- Mood swings
- Feels ill in the morning
- Becomes withdrawn or starts stammering
- Becomes aggressive and unreasonable
- Refuses to talk about what is wrong
- Begins to target siblings
- Continually ‘loses’ money or starts stealing

**Physical signs**
- Has unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches
- Comes home with missing or damaged belongings or clothes
- Comes home hungry

**School signs**
- Doesn’t want to go to school
- Changes their route to school or are frightened of walking to school
- Doesn’t want to go to school on the bus/tram/train
- School grades begin to fall

**Other signs**
Sometimes bullying can be far more hidden. The signs include:
- Often being alone or excluded from friendship groups at school
- Being a frequent target for teasing, mimicking or ridicule at school
- Being unable to speak up in class and appears insecure or frightened.

Who outside the school can help?
- ReachOut.com.au [reachout.com](http://reachout.com)
- Beyondblue [www.youthbeyondblue.org.au](http://www.youthbeyondblue.org.au)
- The Australian Psychological Society [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

Sex differences in bullying
Researchers have found sex differences in bullying among children and adolescents. For example, male and female bullies tend to use different types of bullying. Boys are more likely to threaten someone with physical force and actually use physical violence, whereas girls are more likely to spread rumours, exclude other girls from social activities, belittle or tease them (Healey, Dowson & Nelson, 2006; Kaplan, 2004; Rigby, 1997). There is, however, research evidence which indicates that girls may be just as aggressive as boys but are more able to hide this from adults (Fuller, 1998).

**FIGURE 10.52** Exclusion may be viewed by female bullies as a very effective strategy when wanting to hurt another girl.
American psychologist Paul Kaplan (2004) suggests that sex differences in bullying may exist because girls tend to be punished more severely than boys when they use physical violence. He also suggests that teasing and exclusion may be viewed by female bullies as very effective strategies when wanting to hurt another girl. Girls tend to place a higher value on their relationships and social connections than do boys. This view has been confirmed by an Australian research study. Australian psychologists Ken Rigby and Dale Bagshaw (2001) surveyed girls and boys in schools and found that more girls than boys viewed social aggression as more hurtful than physical aggression.

**Causes of bullying**

As with other forms of aggression, bullying is intended to harm others. In the case of bullying, the victim is often someone who has done nothing at all to the bully. What causes someone to use bullying acts?

Since bullying is a form of aggression, factors that influence aggression also influence bullying. For example, one explanation of aggression, called the frustration-aggression hypothesis, has been used to explain bullying. This is based on research findings that some parents of bullies tend to be inconsistent with discipline. Sometimes they are harsh and at other times they are lax (‘slack’). When they do punish their children for misbehaviour, the punishments are often harsh and involve strong emotional outbursts. Overall, the climate of the family can be considered to be very angry and hostile, with parents having little involvement in their children’s activities or lives. Bullies with this type of home background may be relieving the frustration experienced at home by taking it out on another, less powerful person (Kaplan, 2004). However, not all parents of children who bully others are inconsistent in their use of discipline or are less caring towards their children. Many children and adolescents who bully others come from caring families.

There is also considerable research evidence to suggest that a child in a dysfunctional family is more likely to bully others. For example, Ken Rigby (1996) conducted research on the family backgrounds of 644 adolescent children in South Australian schools. He found that children identified as bullies, regardless of sex, were different from children not identified as bullies in terms of the way in which they thought their families functioned. For example, bullies tended to view their families as being unsympathetic when they felt sad, not being able to understand them, treating them like a child rather than a maturing person, and generally not being caring or accepting of them.

Other specific causes of bullying have also been suggested. On the basis of research findings conducted by other psychologists, Kaplan (2004) argues that some bullies may have a need to gain control over other people; for example, their victims. Other bullies may believe that they are gaining the respect of others through their acts of intimidation. By being a bully and getting what they want, they may achieve and maintain dominance and control in their friendship groups. Furthermore, because bullying often enables a bully to get what they want through aggressive acts, they learn that bullying is an effective way of achieving things. Consequently, bullies often have a positive attitude to bullying.

In schools, bullies tend to be rejected or avoided by other students; however, they are not necessarily isolated by others. Bullies often report that they find it easy to make friends. Among younger children in particular, highly aggressive boys may be among the most popular and socially connected children in primary school classrooms, as viewed by their fellow students and even their teachers. Bullies do form friendships, but mostly with other bullies or aggressive students. They seem unaware or unconcerned about their unpopularity with non-aggressive students. Furthermore, they often fail to understand the ways in which other students may view them, not realising how their bullying reduces the number of relationships they may have had if they did not bully others.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.33**

**Review questions**

1. What are three possible explanations of bullying?
2. What have you observed at school in relation to research findings on sex differences in types of bullying?
3. Researchers have found that some of the effects of bullying described on page 437 can be both a partial cause and a consequence of the bullying, especially for victims who are passive and submissive in nature. What have you observed at school?

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.34**

**Reflection**

Bullying at school is an age-old problem but bullying prevention programs have reduced its incidence to some degree. Comment on whether it is possible to entirely control bullying in schools.
INFLUENCES OF MEDIA ON BEHAVIOUR

We live in an age of mass communication in a media-saturated world. Most people now have access to traditional media such as television, and many also have access to newer digital media technologies such as a computer, an internet connection and a mobile phone. In the last 20 years or so, these media technologies have transformed the world into a ‘global village’. An ever increasing number of people have never known life without a computer or the internet. The new media has not only changed how we communicate, but also how we gather and use information about the world and how we present ourselves to others.

Our access to new types of media has generated new questions and new research about the positive and negative influences in our lives, particularly in children and adolescents. This research has been in three areas. First, there are studies that have examined how often and for how long people interact with different types of media. Second, there are studies investigating how the media is used. Third, there are studies that consider the effects of media on our lives (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2011).

In this section, we briefly consider findings from the first two areas to outline the media environment in which we live and the patterns of media access and use in Australia. We then focus on influences of television, video (electronic) games, social media and advertising from a psychological perspective.

Patterns of media access and use

Australians are renowned for being among the fastest adopters and most prolific users of digital media. Digital media rapidly change, but just as quickly as they become available, they are integrated into many areas of Australian life. In the past decade, TV viewing has been eroded by internet use and video gaming during free time. Although these activities are often combined, TV viewing continues to be prevalent in all age groups.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2013a), in 2011–12, Australian adults spent an average of about 15 hours a week watching TV. Adults also spent over 5 hours per week using the computer at home and about 40 minutes playing video games. Children and adolescents aged 5–17 years spent on average nearly one and a half hours per day watching TV and close to half an hour a day using the internet for non-homework purposes. In addition, boys spent over half an hour playing video games, whereas girls spent only eight minutes. In homework represented the smallest portion of digital media usage at an average of only six minutes per day, rising to 17 minutes for 15–17-year-olds. Toddlers and pre-schoolers (aged 2–4 years) spent almost one and a half hours watching TV, DVDs or playing video games.

About half (51%) of all 5–17-year-olds had at least one type of digital media (e.g. TV, computer, or game console) in their bedroom. Close to one in six toddlers (2–4 years) also had access to digital media in their bedrooms. Of the 15–17-year-olds, three-quarters had some kind of digital media in their bedroom and this was associated with them spending an extra two hours per week using digital media compared with those who did not have any in their bedroom (ABS, 2013b).

As at 31 December 2014, there were 21 million mobile handset subscribers in Australia. At that time the total Australian population was 23.5 million. It is estimated that over a third of all children aged 5–14 years own a mobile phone. Ownership increases with age — about three-quarters (76%) of 12–14-year-olds own a mobile phone, compared with 2% of 5–8-year-olds. Children mainly use their mobile phones to contact family (60%) rather than friends (36%). Less than 10% of children use their mobile phone to access the internet (ABS, 2014).

Mobile phones are also very important for older children, being used by over 75% of 12–14-year-olds and increasing to over 90% of 15–17-year-olds. The use of fixed-line phones is the least preferred means of communication for 15–17-year-olds, behind instant messaging on a mobile or computer, mobile voice and email on a computer (Rutherford, Bittman & Biron, 2010).

The mobile phone has also influenced the way many young people in particular manage and conduct their lives. For example, one study found that 94% of mobile phone owners aged 18–29 years take photos with their phones, 68% record videos with their phones, 65% email on their phones and 45% do banking on their phones. Many people aged 30 and over also use their phones for these activities, but younger people are substantially more likely to do all these (and more) on their mobiles than older adults. Young people are also much more likely to engage in ‘just-in-time’ information-seeking activities on their phone than are older adults (Lenhart, 2013).
Internet access and activity

In 2012–13, 83% of all Australian households had internet access. Almost every household with children under 15 years of age had access to the internet at home (96%), as compared to 78% of households without children under 15 years of age. Households with older persons (aged 65 years or over) had the lowest proportion of internet access (at 46%). The proportions of men and women accessing the internet are almost even, at 84% and 83% respectively (ABS, 2013c) (see figure 10.54).

Research shows that about 80% of Australians use the internet daily (Sensis, 2015). Overall, internet activity is highest amongst people under 35 years. When asked about specific use at home other than for emailing and general browsing, the four most popular online activities are paying bills or banking online (72%), social networking (66%), listening to music or watching videos or movies online (58%), and accessing government services (58%) (ABS, 2013c) (see figures 10.55 and 10.56).

There are, however, age differences in internet activity. As shown in figure 10.55, 15–17-year-olds most commonly went online for educational purposes (93%), whereas 18–24-year-olds preferred social networking (92%) over other activities. All other age groups (25–34-year-olds through to people aged 65 years or over) report their most common online activity as paying bills or banking online. More specific internet activities by older persons aged 65 years or over are shown in figure 10.57.

How children aged 5–14 years use the internet tends to change with age. At a young age, children treated the internet more as a source of entertainment. As they get older, they begin to see the internet more as place for accessing information and socialising (see figure 10.57).
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.35

Analysis of data on online activities

Consider the data in figures 10.55 (page 441), 10.56 and 10.57 on online activities. Draw three conclusions for each of the following:

1. Differences between 15–17- and 18–24-year-olds in online activities
2. Age differences in online activities by children at home aged 5–14 years
3. Gender differences in online activities by older people aged 65 years or over
4. (a) Differences in online activities between children and older people
   (b) Comment on whether more recent data would be different for both children and older people, with reference to relevant examples.

Social media activity

The most dramatic and rapid recent change has been in the growing number of Australians using social media — websites and applications (‘apps’) that allow social networking and sharing of information. As shown in figure 10.59, we do this wherever we can — in workplaces, schools, bedrooms and even the toilet cubicle. A study of Australian internet users found that nearly 50% of people aged 18 years and older who have internet access use social media daily, rising to 79% in the 18–29 age group.

Facebook is by far the most commonly used social media platform (by 93% of social media users who have a profile), followed by LinkedIn (28%), Instagram (26%), Google+ (23%), Pinterest (17%), and Twitter (17%). Facebook users can spend the equivalent of a full working day using it each week, averaging 8.5 hours on the site (Sensis, 2015). Additional data on social media use is shown in figures 10.58 and 10.59.
Positive and negative influences

Clearly, research studies show that Australians of all ages use traditional and new media technologies frequently and in a variety of ways. Generally, usage is for three main purposes — as a source of information (including education and commercial), for entertainment and for social communication. As the new media technologies continue to become embedded within homes and schools, psychologists have become increasingly interested in the positive and negative influences on individual and group behaviour, particularly of children.

Television

Of all the media forms, television remains the most influential in the lives of both children and adults. Among children, 1 in 8 aged 3 to 4 years and 1 in 6 aged 6 to 7 years have a television set in their own bedroom. Some watch many hours of television/videos/DVDs each day, but the amount is influenced by socio-economic factors, such as the parents’ occupations, income levels, educational backgrounds and cultural backgrounds (Rutherford, Bittman & Biron, 2010).

A number of Australian and international studies have found that watching television has no significant benefit for children under two years of age, nor does it have any other positive or negative influence. This is mainly because of their limited ability to attend to and cognitively process the onscreen information (Anderson & Pempak, 2005; Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2011). Although many parents believe that children under two years of age can develop their verbal language skills from watching television, research shows that infants are more likely to learn far more new words from their adult caregivers than from television (Krcmar, Grela & Lin, 2007; Zack et al. 2009).

Young children over the age of two years are more able to interact with what they see on the screen; for example, by clapping hands and imitating behaviours. By the age of five years, children can watch television effectively, even when they are in an environment where they can be easily distracted. Consequently, the content of what is being watched can be influential.

As they get older, children tend to watch television for entertainment but research studies have found...
that they do not passively sit there and take in everything. They make a number of choices about what they will watch, when they will watch it and how much attention they will give it. They show a lot of interest in content they understand which is funny or fascinating. They like character movement, animation, sound effects, and children’s or women’s voices. Violence does not have to be present to keep them interested.

Television can affect the behaviour and psychological development of children with the views of reality that it depicts and the messages it conveys about how other people in the world act and react. As we get older we become increasingly able to distinguish between fact and fantasy in television programs and to recognise the subtle range of fact and fiction in many programs. But people can hang on to early beliefs while false stereotypes and other misconceptions about the world can persist through adulthood (Gunter & McAleer, 1997; Lemish, 2007).

Generally, many psychologists believe television has a huge potential to positively influence the behavioural and psychological development of children. For example, various television programs can have the potential to enhance information-processing skills and increase general knowledge. Through television, children can be taught many positive concepts and introduced to issues of morality. However, relatively few programs use their capacity to influence children positively so public attention has become focused on the negative aspects of television.

Television programs in general include a large number of violent interactions. In particular, aggressive incidents (physical and verbal) occur in all aspects of television — in movies, dramas, comedies, cartoons, news, music videos, trailers and advertisements. This means that a child might see thousands of examples of aggressive behaviour each year. Furthermore, a significant amount of the televised violence to which children may be exposed is either glamorised (e.g. an action hero portrays it) or trivialised (e.g. it is shown as entertaining, or the consequences for the victim are ignored) (Rutherford, Bittman & Biron, 2010).

The potential effects of observing violence provide the most controversial and widely researched topic in psychology with regard to television. Although there is conflicting evidence on the effects of observing violence, public opinion tends to blame television for the increasing prevalence of violence in our society.

What does research indicate about the effects of violence upon children? According to the Australian Psychological Society (2013):

- exposure to violent television can and does influence children’s feelings, attitudes and behaviour
- it is generally agreed that prolonged exposure to television violence is one of a number of factors which lead to children being more likely to display aggressive behaviour in both the short term and the long term
- some children enjoy, and develop an appetite for, viewing violent material

- viewing violence on television leads to immediate distress and fear in many children
- many children retain longer-term recurrent disturbing memories from viewed violence
- exposure to media violence can contribute to beliefs that aggression is an acceptable and effective behaviour, can induce fear and anxiety and the belief that the world is ‘a mean and scary place’
- continual exposure to media violence increases the likelihood that children will be desensitised to real violence
- age and gender are important influences on the nature of the effects, with younger children likely to be more susceptible to learning from TV
- the social context of viewing is important in determining the effects of exposure to violent television; for example, if an adult helps the child interpret and critique the viewed material, the negative effects are lessened.
merely a viewer. This means that a player is directly ‘responsible’ for aggressive, sometimes extremely aggressive, actions.

It has been estimated that over 95% of adolescents aged 12–17 play video games — on a computer, on consoles such as Wii, Playstation and Xbox, or on portable devices such as Gameboys, smartphones and tablets. In one survey, half of all young adolescents reported playing a video game ‘yesterday’, and those who played every day typically did so for an hour or more. Consequently, most studies on influences of violent video game playing have focused on older children and adolescents (American Psychological Association, 2013). In a meta analysis of studies on violent video game playing in different cultures, American psychologist Craig Anderson and his colleagues (2010) concluded that exposure to violent video games is a ‘causal risk factor’ for increased aggressive behaviour; increased aggressive thoughts, increased aggressive emotions, decreased empathy and decreased prosocial behaviour.

These findings are similar to results from studies on television violence but exposure to game violence is viewed as more serious because of the interactive nature of video game violence. In particular, the player is encouraged to identify with an avatar, which then engages in violent actions at the command of the player (Rutherford, Bittman & Biron, 2010).

Other researchers have found that violent video game playing does not necessarily translate into violent behaviour in the real world (Jerabeck & Ferguson, 2013). In addition, researchers who have evaluated studies reporting a link between video game violence and real life violence have found that many of these studies did not control for potential confounding variables such as the mental health condition and family environment of participants. In addition, children and adolescents who are already at risk for aggressive and violent behaviour may be more likely to choose to play violent video games (Ferguson, 2011).

Overall, the results of research studies suggest that, as with viewing of television violence, there can be negative influences of video game violence but, for most children and adolescents, it may be only one of a number of factors contributing to violent behaviour.

Another concern about video games is that game playing may result in social isolation and inhibit development of important social interaction skills. However, being a player does not mean being a loner, even if the player has a video gaming addiction. Many games are now designed to promote cooperative play or competitive multiplayer activities. Time spent playing games often means time spent socially

Although various studies suggest that there is a significant link between television violence and aggressive behaviour, a direct causal link has not been established. Factors that need to be considered when investigating the effects of television violence include whether the violence appears to be realistic (as opposed to the unrealistic violence of cartoons), whether the violence seems to be warranted or justified, and the situation in which the violence occurs. The characteristics of the observer are also important; for example, some children may be more likely to become aggressive and may therefore be more easily influenced by observing violence.

Before television was around, some people still behaved aggressively. Every behaviour has many determinants, and to say that one single factor such as television causes a certain behaviour would be simplifying the issue too much. Television is no longer the only media source of violent examples, and children can observe aggressive behaviours in other media, including when playing video games.

**Video games**

The advent of video games raised new questions about the potential impact of media violence, since the video game player is an active participant rather than

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**FIGURE 10.61** According to the Australian Psychological Society (2013), exposure to violent television can and does influence children’s feelings, attitudes and behaviour.
interacting. As many as three-quarters of children and adolescents actually play these games with other people, whether online or in person (Lenhart et al., 2008). However, much research still needs to be conducted on whether online social interaction through gaming has the same potential benefits as the interpersonal interactions we have in real life.

Of course, numerous video games do not have any violence whatsoever and many of these games can have positive influences; for example, educational games and community-oriented games in which people address issues and solve problems. Many of these games involve thinking about social, moral and ethical issues, and decision making about how a virtual community, city or nation should be run (Greitemeyer, Osswald & Brauer, 2010). Some of the less complex games played by young children can help the development of fine motor skills and coordination. They can also contribute to development of digital literacy when the child is confident about their use of the technology.

Social media

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of many Australians. Research indicates that about 70% of internet users have a social media profile. For many, social media is a regular part of everyday life. About 1 in 4 people use it more than five times a day, mainly from their smart phones, to keep their ‘finger on the pulse’ and get a real-time perspective of what is happening around them (Sensis, 2015).

As shown in table 10.4, there are many reasons given for using social media but nearly all users see it as a way to keep in touch with friends or family. Some people like sharing photo or video content or news and current affairs content, while some use it for coordinating social events, research or commercial purposes such as following brands or finding out about entertainment and offers.

There are also sex and age differences in usage. Females share photos and videos or follow brands to access promotions more frequently than males. Males are more likely to use social media to meet and connect with people who share interests; for example, to meet new friends or write a review. Nearly all reasons for use shown in table 10.4 are more prevalent in the under 30s but especially sharing photos and videos, coordinating parties, following brands or celebrities and finding out about events (Sensis, 2015).

Facebook and other social media have changed how we socially interact, particularly among younger people. The data on social media usage shown in table 10.4 suggest an important positive influence in fostering and supporting social networking and communication. Social media helps people stay connected with friends and family, regardless of geographical distance and other physical constraints. For shy and introverted people it can help overcome barriers to connectivity with others as it enables friendships and communication behind the security or safety of a screen. Research has found that many people (67%) report that social media has strengthened relationships with family and friends rather than weakened those relationships (18%) (Fox & Rainie, 2014).

As with video gaming, concerns have been expressed about a negative influence of social media on social skills due to the absence of face-to-face contact. It has also been suggested that social media sites can make it more difficult for us to distinguish between the meaningful relationships we foster in the real world, and the numerous casual relationships.
content and use social media to reach wide
groups and organisations can create
behaviour in targeted ways. Individuals,
achieved lower grades that students who did
once during a 15-minute study period
students who checked Facebook at least

distractor or time waster at critical times.
impact on learning, especially when it is a
ways. But social media can also negatively
promote learning in engaging
such as Wikis, blogs and discussion forums
a means of accessing and exchanging a
well as promoting digital literacy, it provides
is its educational bene
research remains to be done.
reached (Jung, 2015). There is a
relationships, our most important connections with
much of our time on these less meaningful
formed through social network sites. By focusing so
much of our time on these less meaningful
relationships, our most important connections with
other people may weaken (Jung, 2015). There is a
lack of research evidence to support this and much
research remains to be done.
Another positive influence of social media
is its educational benefits. For example, as
well as promoting digital literacy, it provides
a means of accessing and exchanging a
diverse range of information through tools
such as Wikis, blogs and discussion forums
that can promote learning in engaging
ways. But social media can also negatively
impact on learning, especially when it is a
distractor or time waster at critical times.
For example, studies have found that
middle school, senior school and university
students who checked Facebook at least
once during a 15-minute study period
achieved lower grades that students who did
not (Rosen, 2011).
Social media is also increasingly used
as an agent to influence and change our
behaviour in targeted ways. Individuals,
groups and organisations can create
content and use social media to reach wide
audiences virtually anywhere in the world. For example,
people have used it for social and political meetings,
to gain support and funds for a cause or election to a
position of power, to protest, as a major organising or
recruiting tool for a political or social movement, to
initiate change of government, and so on.
The social media profile of young people has caused
significant problems for some when they sought
employment. It is now common practice for job
recruiters, employers and human resources managers
to check social media postings of job applicants
before shortlisting (see box 10.10 on page 448). Many
applicants have been overlooked for jobs because of
unfavourable postings and other personal information
in their profiles (Jobvite, 2014). Young people aged
12–17 are becoming increasingly aware of the potential
negative consequences of personal information
they have posted and many now take steps to shape
their reputation, manage their networks, and mask
information they do not want others to know. For
example, one study found that 74% of young adolescent
social media users have deleted people from their
network or friends list (Madden et al., 2013).
Other potential negative influences of social media
include adverse consequences that may be
associated with loss of privacy, identity theft and
cyber safety (including cyberbullying) issues. These
have also influenced young people to better manage
their online identities. A recent American study
of young adolescents, for example, found that 45%
have removed their name from photos that have
been tagged to identify them, 31% have deleted or
deactivated an entire profile or account and 19% have
posted updates, comments, photos, or videos that they
later regretted sharing (Madden et al., 2013). Many
more, however, have not taken any of these actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for using social networking sites</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catch up with family and friends</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share photographs or videos</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get information on news and current events</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordinate parties or other shared activities</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow or find out about particular brands or businesses in general</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out about entertainment events</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play games</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research holiday destinations or travel offers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow particular brands to access offers or promotions</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research products and services you might want to buy</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find people with the same interests</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new friends</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow celebrities</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide reviews/write blogs about products you have bought</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure from family and friends to use them</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage with a government representative or department</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find potential dates</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


FIGURE 10.63 The internet gives access to numerous social network sites.
### BOX 10.10

**How job recruiters use social media**

Job recruiters, human resource managers and employers are increasingly using social media to look for or review potential employees. One major survey of recruiters’ use of social media involved over 1500 employers. Ninety-three per cent reported that they will review a job candidate’s social profile when making their appointment decision and 55% reported that they have reconsidered a candidate based on their social profile, with 61% of those reconsiderations being negative.

The following table shows what recruiters look for in a candidate on social networking sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Percent of recruiters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional experience</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of professional tenure</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific hard skills</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual connections</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry-related posts</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of written or design work</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural fit</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows recruiters’ attitudes to information posted at candidates’ sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling/grammar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal drug references</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual posts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering/donations to charity</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political affiliation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Advertising

The average TV viewer will probably see more than 20,000 advertisements a year. Those who are also active internet users will see many more in banners and pop-ups. In fact, it is virtually impossible to avoid exposure to advertisements wherever we are and whatever we are doing, whether online or not.

Many advertisements are intended to have a positive influence by providing a public service or helping to protect us from harm. For example, some warn about the dangers of drink driving, speeding, cigarette smoking, exposure to the sun, coward punches, illegal drugs and not having an escape plan if living in a bushfire-prone area. Other advertisements advise us to watch out for possible signs of diseases, cancers or terrorist activity. Still others inform us about new or improved products, services, health benefits of this or that, ways to improve our lives, and so on, usually at an affordable cost or cheaper than an alternative. Nonetheless, a great deal of advertising, though often intrusive or annoying, is beneficial by being informative and educational. A lot of what we see and hear is true, but some is intentionally misleading or false.

Much advertising is directed at children because children represent a major market segment. Many of these products are unhealthy foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt and/or sugar content and can therefore have a major effect on children’s lifestyles. The increasing use of new media has meant that large sums of money spent targeting children through television and newspaper advertising have been transferred to the internet and digital media such as game apps.
Psychologists have raised concerns about the negative influence of children's advertisements because children under the age of about 8 years struggle to understand the persuasive intent of an advertisement — its ‘sales pitch’. They tend to believe that everything they see in advertisements is true. Due to their lack of experience, children under the age of eight have less resistance to advertisements and lack the understanding to defend themselves against the persuasive intent (Rutherford, Bittman & Biron, 2010).

In addition, preschool children have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality and make-believe from lying. Many preschoolers cannot tell when a television program ends and an advertisement begins, and many actually prefer certain advertisements. They do not understand the difference between a program designed to entertain and a commercial designed to sell. This is made especially difficult when celebrities and fictional characters are used to promote products. Research studies with web-based advertisements have found that that 6 to 8-year-old children also have difficulties distinguishing these types of advertisements from a core program and other onscreen content (Moondoore et al., 2009).

When producing an advertisement that targets children, a key objective is to give the child a good reason to nag a parent for the product. Children's requests for products they have seen advertised are sometimes called 'pester power' and can lead to family arguments and conflict. Many parents believe that a child's desire for products can make them materialistic by suggesting that the means to a happier life lies in buying consumer goods. This is a particular concern in Asian cultures where people still emphasise communal values over individual possessions (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2011).

There has also been considerable concern about the idealised life images and stereotypes that are created and perpetuated by advertisements, especially TV advertisements. For example, advertisements have tended to cultivate certain standards that define physical attractiveness and portray gender stereotypes in ways that can affect a healthy self-image and create feelings of inadequacy, especially in adolescent girls. However, significant changes have occurred in this regard in recent years, with advertisers having become more sensitive to stereotyping population groups. In particular, the image of women in advertisements has changed significantly so that men and women tend to be portrayed equally.

Although there is some government regulation over advertising, such as for products that cannot be advertised on TV during children's viewing times, advertising remains a very prominent occurrence in our lives. Most psychological research has focused on how advertisements try to influence and how we cognitively process their content rather than specific behavioural influences. In particular, researchers have analysed advertisements and identified three main components they have in common: a source of the message (who), a message (what) and a target audience (to whom). Each of these components has been studied intensively and it has been found that their respective characteristics combine to determine the effectiveness of any type of persuasive communication strategy. In sum, the impact of an advertisement is determined by who says what to whom and the individual who is watching.

FIGURE 10.65 Advertisements often present idealised images and stereotypes.
LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.37

Summarising media influences
Complete the table below to summarise the positive and negative influences of various media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of media</th>
<th>Positive influence</th>
<th>Negative influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**eBookplus**  
Word copy of table

**eGuideplus**  
Practical activity — stereotypes in the media

**Weblink**  
TED talk on Muslim and Middle Eastern stereotypes in the media 6m 34s

LEARNING ACTIVITY 10.38

Reflection
Comment on what role parents should play in a young child’s usage of digital media. In what way(s), if at all, should the parental role change for older children?
CHAPTER 10 TEST

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 term social influence describes
A. someone’s behaviour when they socially interact with others.
B. the way in which someone interacts with others in different social situations.
C. the influence of someone’s personal thoughts and feelings on how they can best behave in a group.
D. how the presence or actions of others can affect someone’s behaviour.

Question 2
An individual’s ability to control or influence someone else’s behaviour is best described as
A. power.
B. status.
C. a role.
D. pro-social behaviour.

Question 3
Which of the following is not a characteristic of a group?
A. There are two or more people.
B. There is interaction between members.
C. Some members have a different group goal.
D. Different members can influence one another.

Question 4
The importance of an individual’s position or standing in a group, as viewed by members of the group, is best described as
A. power.
B. status.
C. peer pressure.
D. peer influence.

Question 5
Which of the following is a source of power in a group?
A. having information that group members need
B. low status
C. having the ability to be punished by others in the group
D. a loss of individuality

Question 6
A key finding of the Zimbardo Stanford Prison Experiment is that
A. power can be used to influence someone else’s behaviour but status cannot.
B. status can be used to influence someone else’s behaviour but power cannot.
C. role expectations can lead people to behave differently from the way in which they would normally behave.
D. all participants in the experiment did their best to behave as the experimenter wanted them to behave.

Question 7
Research studies have found that disobedience during warfare is rarer among those ordered to kill from a distance with a missile than close-up with a knife. These results suggest that _____ may influence obedience.
A. friendship
B. legitimacy of the authority figure
C. social proximity
D. group pressure

Question 8
If someone in a group has legitimate power, then they have the _____ to direct or influence the behaviour of other group members.
A. social skills
B. right
C. expertise
D. information

Question 9
Which of the following behaviours best describes conformity?
A. following the commands of someone in authority
B. adjusting one’s actions so that they are consistent with those of group members
C. giving an incorrect answer when all other group members give the correct answer
D. giving the correct answer when all other group members give an incorrect answer
Question 10
As group size increases, conformity by an individual to the group’s behaviour tends to
A. stay the same.
B. decrease.
C. increase.
D. increase, but only up to a group size of four.

Question 11
Jake conforms because he wants to be liked and accepted by the group. This is an example of conforming due to
A. normative influence.
B. unanimity.
C. informational influence.
D. culture.

Question 12
Lim is taking up surfing. She buys a surfboard with two fins rather than one fin on the advice of a surfer friend.
This is an example of conformity due to
A. normative influence.
B. unanimity.
C. informational influence.
D. culture.

Question 13
Obedience involves
A. following the commands of someone in authority.
B. choosing to do as the rest of the group does, even when not in agreement with the group.
C. exerting power and influence over someone.
D. exerting power and status over someone.

Question 14
An analysis of the results of Asch-type experiments in many different countries found that
A. people in North America and Western Europe show the highest levels of conformity to group pressure.
B. people in collectivist cultures are less likely to conform to group pressure than people in individualistic cultures.
C. people in individualist cultures are less likely to conform to group pressure.
D. people in all cultures seldom conform to group pressure.

Question 15
The results of Milgram-type experiments that have been conducted in many different countries with participants from various kinds of backgrounds indicate that
A. most people refuse to be obedient when they become distressed.
B. there are significant sex differences in obedience.
C. there are significant age differences in obedience.
D. obedience in a Milgram-type experimental situation seems to occur regardless of sex or age.

Question 16
In one experiment on obedience, 22 hospital nurses were telephoned one at a time throughout the day by an unknown ‘doctor’ who ordered them to give a ‘patient’ an obvious overdose of a drug. All but one nurse complied without delay (until they were intercepted on their way to the patient).
Although not all nurses are so compliant, these nurses probably obeyed due to
A. ethical issues involved in disobeying a doctor.
B. the doctor’s legitimate authority over them.
C. the social proximity of the doctor.
D. group pressure to obey.

Question 17
Samir is upset by an unfair request by a teacher to clean up the classroom, but obeys the teacher despite being upset. The teacher then makes the same request to Sara and Luke who refuse to obey. When Samir observes this, he also decides to disobey and stops cleaning.
Samir’s change of mind about complying with the teacher’s request is best explained by
A. ethical issues that are involved when teachers make unfair requests of students.
B. the realisation that the teacher is not a legitimate authority figure.
C. the social proximity of Sara and Luke.
D. the presence of group support.

Question 18
Which of the following examples involves bullying?
A. A year 10 student keeps picking on a year 7 boy who annoys him.
B. A teacher gives one week’s detention to a student who has seriously misbehaved.
C. A girl verbally abuses another student who shut the door on her fingers.
D. A boy tells another student that he’ll ‘dob him in’ if he doesn’t return the DVD he believes was stolen from him.

Question 19
Oscar is driving to a fancy dress party wearing a Superman outfit. While waiting at a red traffic light, he sees an elderly lady collapse on the footpath. Although Oscar is competent in first aid and has plenty of time to help, he drives off when the traffic light turns green because he is afraid he will look ‘stupid’ to other motorists and pedestrians if he gets out and helps.
Oscar’s failure to help is best explained by
A. anti-social thoughts.
B. the social responsibility norm.
C. audience inhibition.
D. bystander intervention.
Question 20
A car accident that occurs at a busy intersection during peak hour is witnessed by several pedestrians. No-one is injured, but it is not until 45 minutes later that the police arrive to redirect traffic and clear the road. The police did not arrive earlier because no-one reported the accident.

The failure of anyone to report the accident is best explained by
A. bystander intervention.
B. diffusion of responsibility.
C. deindividuation.
D. the social responsibility norm.

Question 21
Sam was bullied throughout primary school and knows what it feels like to be bullied. During lunchtime, she sees a student being bullied by others. She immediately reports this to the teacher on playground duty and the teacher stops the bullying. Sam’s motivation for helping is best explained by
A. her noticing the incident.
B. her sex.
C. her empathy.
D. the reciprocity norm.

Question 22
Dominic decides not to stop and help an elderly lady with a flat tyre because stopping to help will make him late for a job interview and he may get his suit dirty. As Dominic drives past, he feels a bit guilty but consoles himself with the understanding that since the lady is a stranger, he will probably never see her again.

Dominic’s failure to stop and help is best explained by
A. social norms.
B. social influence.
C. shift in attention.
D. cost–benefit analysis.

Question 23
The reciprocity norm explains helping in terms of
A. mutual respect.
B. giving because we received.
C. having and not having.
D. not wanting to owe anything to anybody.

Question 24
Social norms are best described as
A. rules.
B. laws.
C. instinctive ways of behaving.
D. known ways of behaving.

Question 25
Being in a good mood typically increases the likelihood of helping, whereas being in a bad mood
A. can increase the likelihood of helping.
B. can decrease the likelihood of helping.
C. can increase or decrease the likelihood of helping.
D. has no effect on the likelihood of helping.

SECTION B — Short-answer questions
Answer all questions in the spaces provided. Write using black or blue pen.

Question 1 (2 marks)
When we obey an order from someone in a uniform we are most likely influenced by the ____________________ of this authority figure; whereas when we obey an order from someone because ‘everyone else’ is obeying, then we are most likely influenced by ____________________.

Question 2 (2 marks)
What are two characteristics that distinguish cyberbullying from other types of bullying?
Question 3 (4 marks)
Describe a positive and a negative influence of two different types of digital media on behaviour. Ensure you name the media types.

Question 4 (3 marks)
According to Latane and Darley (1968), what three key factors associated with a specific situation in which help is needed are required before someone considers providing help?

Question 5 (2 marks)
Explain how being drunk in a large group or crowd can increase the likelihood of someone engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Question 6 (2 marks)
Jack is jogging to the local gym where he usually works out four or five times a week. He is feeling good because his dad just rang him on the mobile to tell him that he can go to Lorne for ‘schoolies’ week. Shortly after the call, Jack spots a middle-aged man struggling to push his broken-down car to the side of a moderately busy street. It seems to Jack that the car has a flat battery or has run out of petrol. Jack chuckles to himself because he drives an even older model of the car and believes that it is a ‘heap of rubbish’.

Explain whether Jack is likely to help the man push his car off the road. Ensure you refer to two key personal factors that can influence helping behaviour.
Question 7 (2 marks)
Four drivers of other vehicles stop and help someone trapped in their car following a collision. The drivers work cooperatively in administering first aid and to safely remove the trapped person from the car before emergency services arrive.

Explain whether or not the four drivers are a group, with reference to two distinguishing features of a group.

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Question 8 (3 marks)
Explain how power and status affected the behaviour of the ‘mock guards’ and ‘mock prisoners’ in Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment.

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The answers to the multiple-choice questions are in the answer section at the back of this book and in eBookPLUS.

The answers to the short-answer questions are in eBookPLUS.