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PENAL REFORM INTERNATIONAL

Balancing security and dignity in prisons:

a framework for preventive monitoring



A Detention Monitoring Tool resource

Second edition

Incorporates the 2015 revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)

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Penal Reform International (PRI) is an independent non-governmental organisation that develops and promotes fair, effective and proportionate responses to criminal justice problems worldwide.

We promote alternatives to prison which support the rehabilitation of offenders, and promote the right of detainees to fair and humane treatment. We campaign for the prevention of torture and the abolition of the death penalty, and we work to ensure just and appropriate responses to children and women who come into contact with the law.

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Introduction

When a state deprives a person of their liberty, it incurs a duty of care to ensure that the dignity of that person is respected. States must also ensure that prisons are safe and secure for detainees, staff, visitors and the outside community. These two obligations are not contradictory, but go hand in hand, as security can be best ensured in a well ordered and justly administered system, which treats prisoners with humanity and fairness.[1]

In coercive establishments such as prisons, there is a danger that concerns about security and order prevail too easily over dignity and fairness. Security measures that are excessive or conducted in a systematic way can infringe on the dignity of detainees, for example through unnecessary restrictions on movement, possessions or activities, routine body searching or the disproportionate or prolonged use of solitary confinement. While individual security measures may not reach this threshold, collectively they may amount to inhuman or degrading treatment.

This risk is greater when there is political or media pressure for tighter security and tougher responses to crime. This trend has been observed in many countries over the last decade including as a response to an upsurge – or perceived upsurge – in organised crime, social violence and the threat of terrorism related offences.

Persons deprived of their liberty are in a situation of power imbalance and particularly vulnerable to abuse. In many ways security 'trumps' dignity, for a number of reasons, including the following:

- security measures are sometimes increased to compensate for a shortage of human resources;
- prison staff want to avoid being criticised for 'lax security' and therefore may opt for more severe security options;
- insufficient training can mean that staff employ security measures that are unnecessary or disproportionate.

Monitoring bodies, including National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) designated under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), have an important role to play in detecting, assessing and analysing the risks to human dignity posed by an overemphasis on security measures.

Through their regular visits to places of detention and interviews in private with staff and persons deprived of their liberty, monitoring bodies can obtain first- hand information about how security policies and practices are impacting on the dignity of prisoners. They can analyse whether such measures are necessary and proportionate, and whether they are applied in a fair and non-discriminatory way. On this basis, they can make concrete recommendations on how to ensure that the dignity of detainees is protected rather than compromised by security measures.

This paper aims to assist monitoring bodies, including National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), by providing them with an analytical framework to:

- understand the concepts of dignity and security in prisons and the relationship between them;
- the assumption that persons deprived of their liberty are dangerous or violent can lead to an over-reliance on security measures;
- identify situations where there is a particular risk that security in prisons is overemphasised to the detriment of the dignity of prisoners.

1. Andrew Coyle, *A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management: Handbook for Prison Staff* (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2002) p58.

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Understanding dignity and security in prisons

1. Dignity in detention: a fundamental right

Dignity is inherent to all human beings. It recognises the innate worth and right of individuals to be treated with respect and humanity. It is enshrined in Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that: '[a]ll persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person'. The UN Human Rights Committee specified that respect for human dignity constitutes a norm of general international law not subject to derogation.[2]

As the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) stressed, deprivation of liberty establishes a regime 'of absolute control, loss of privacy, limitation of living space and, above all, a radical decline in the individual's means of defending himself'. The Commission concludes that as a consequence the act of imprisonment 'carries with it a specific and material commitment to protect the prisoner's human dignity'.[3]

While its most fundamental component is the absolute prohibition of torture, the right to dignity includes the provision of adequate material conditions, including sufficient food, water and access to healthcare. De-humanising or humiliating prison routines can also infringe on the dignity of prisoners, such as particularly uncomfortable prison uniforms. In Texas[4] and Rwanda,[5] for example, male prisoners were forced to wear pink prison uniforms, purposefully humiliating them. Obliging women prisoners to wear overalls as prison uniform may have the same effect in that it forces them to undress when using the toilet. In some countries, problematic practices, not justified by security considerations, include pointless routines such as prisoners having to march and sing patriotic songs or only being allowed to walk in certain ways.[6]

The right to dignity also includes operating fair and just rules and procedures, which do not discriminate, and promoting respectful relations between staff and detainees. Attitudes, behaviours, public exposure or abusive language can equally infringe human dignity, taking into account what individuals experience as humiliating or debasing.

The responsibility of the state goes beyond preventing active abuse against prisoners: it includes refraining from humiliating routines that infringe on human dignity and serve no security or other purpose, and ensuring that the suffering involved in places of detention does not exceed the level inherent in the deprivation of liberty.

The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners[7] acknowledge this principle, especially in the areas of the Rules revised in 2015.[8] One of the overarching basic principles in the revised Rules is that all prisoners should be treated with respect for their inherent dignity and value as human beings. This is also expressed in what the Rules require in terms of staff training, which includes the rights and duties of prison staff in the exercise of their functions. Explicit components of these rights and duties are respect for the human dignity of all prisoners and the prohibition of certain conduct, in particular torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Training should also encompasses security and safety – including the concept of dynamic security, the use of force and instruments of restraint, and the management of violent offenders, with due consideration to preventive and defusing techniques, such as negotiation and mediation. Training in the psychosocial needs of prisoners and

2. General Comment No 29, States of emergency (Article 4), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.11, 31 August 2001, para.13a.
3. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Special report on the human rights situation at the Challapalca prison in Peru,* para 113; IACHR, Report No.41/99: Minors in Detention, Honduras, March 10 1999, para.135.
4. For example, see 'Arizona criminals find jail too in-'tents'', *CNN*, 27 July 1999; and 'The cruelest sheriff in America', *Waging Non-Violence website*, 27 July 2009. http://edition.cnn.com/US/9907/27/tough.sheriff/; http://wagingnonviolence.org/2009/07/the-cruelest-sheriff-in-america/. <Accessed 23 September 2013>
5. For example, see 'Rwanda: prison reform by colour, chants and drums', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/15/letter-from-rwanda-prisons-walls. <Accessed 23 September 2013>
6. 'Kazakhstan's Living Gulags', *BBC Radio 4,* 19 August 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03859mq <Accessed 23 September 2013>
7. The revised United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), adopted by the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on 22 May 2015, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council on 9 September 2015, UN-Doc. E/RES/2015/20 and adopted by UN General Assembly Third Committee on 5 November 2015, UN-Doc. A/C.3/70/L.3 (at the time of printing this Resolution was pending adoption by the plenary of the UN General Assembly.)
8. Areas revised included respect for prisoners' inherent dignity and value as human beings; medical and health services; disciplinary action and punishment; investigation of deaths in custody, as well as any signs or allegations of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners; protection and special needs of vulnerable groups; as well as training of staff.

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corresponding dynamics in prison settings, as well as social care and assistance, including early detection of mental health issues, are also a requirement.

The revised Standard Minimum Rules make reference to the obligation of administrations to ensure the safety and security of prisoners, staff, service providers and visitors at all times.[9]

2. Security in detention: a legitimate concern

Providing for security and order is fundamental in places of detention. From a human rights perspective, security and safety constitute an integral part of the state's responsibility to protect persons deprived of their liberty. The state 'assumes a heightened duty of protection by severely limiting an individual's freedom of movement and capacity for self-defence'.[10]

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

'The fact that States exercise effective control of the prisons implies that it must be capable of maintaining internal order and security within prisons, not limiting itself to the external perimeters of the prisons. It should be capable of ensuring at all times the security of the prisoners, their family members, visitors and those who work in the place.'[11]

Ensuring safety includes the provision of measures to prevent and respond to fires or other emergencies, and appropriate working conditions for prisoners and staff. It also includes policies to prevent and reduce levels of suicide and self-harm.

Security in places of detention has several components. Firstly, there is the question of external security (sometimes called perimeter or physical security) aimed at the need to prevent escapes and other undesired and unlawful contact with the outside world. This is mainly achieved through physical structure, such as the prison buildings, walls and fences, alarms and detection systems.

Secondly, there is the question of security within the prison, sometimes referred to as procedural security or control. Procedural security covers such matters as to how prisoners move around the facility, what possessions they are permitted to keep, how they and their visitors are searched, as well as the basic daily routine. Reasonable and proportionate disciplinary rules, that both prisoners and staff have the responsibility to observe, contribute to a well- ordered environment. Effective procedural security requires not only a clear set of regulations, but must be implemented by staff that are adequate in number, recruited on merit, well trained and adequately paid.

UN Prison Incident Management Handbook

'Effectively managing the movement of prisoners within a prison depends on:

- staffing levels being commensurate with the number of prisoners;
- the level of staff skills and competency;
- the layout/configuration of the prison;
- the effectiveness of static security infrastructure;
- the ability to effectively classify and separate categories of prisoners.'[12]

Almost all prison systems have a range of different security levels to match the risks presented by prisoners. Prisoners will be subjected to a process of classification when they first arrive and are allocated to an appropriate level of security. In many countries a 'progressive' system is applied which means that if prisoners comply with the rules they may later be moved to a less restrictive security categorisation.

At one extreme, there are facilities or parts of facilities with very high levels of security, catering for individuals perceived to pose a high risk to other prisoners or themselves, a flight risk, or a high risk to the public if they were to escape. At the other extreme, there may be open prisons where prisoners go to work in the community, have keys to their rooms and live with relative freedom of movement. In between, most states have prisons with a variety of security levels or categories.

One key aspect of safety within prison is the need to prevent violence between prisoners. This can have several dimensions, from isolated acts of violence against individual inmates, regular violence against the most vulnerable detainees, systems of violence by informal structures of gangs or leaderships, to systems of 'self-government' where the prison's internal security is left in the hands of inmates themselves.[13] In many parts of the world, particularly where prisoners are held in dormitory style accommodation or in large halls, control is effectively in the hands of the most dominant prisoners.

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9. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 1 and 76.

10. UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report to the UN General Assembly,* 5 September 2006, A/61/311, para.51.

11. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Report on the human rights of persons deprived of liberty in the Americas,* 2011, para.77.

12. United Nations, *Prison Incident Management Handbook,* 2013, p26.

13. On this issue, see the IACHR report *op.cit*, para.79-93. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture's (CPT) *Report on Latvia 2007* para.40 describes the informal caste based hierarchy common in post-Soviet countries.

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Under 'measures to combat violence and emergency situations' the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights identifies the following preventive measures, inter alia:[14]

- separate the different categories of persons deprived of liberty;
- provide periodic and appropriate instruction and training for the personnel;
- increase the number of personnel in charge of internal security and surveillance, and set up continuous internal surveillance patterns;
- set up early warning mechanisms to prevent crises or emergencies;
- promote mediation and the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts.

So-called 'dynamic security' is an approach to security, which combines positive staff-prisoner relationships with fair treatment and purposeful activities that contribute to their future reintegration into society.

It encompasses actions that contribute to a professional, positive and respectful relationship between prison staff and prisoners. It requires knowledge of the prison population and an understanding of relationships between prisoners, and between prisoners and prison staff, allowing staff to anticipate problems and security risks. The approach acknowledges that the power imbalance of prison staff over prisoners may easily be perceived as provocation or punishment. Dynamic security needs to be accompanied by appropriate policies and procedures, and in particular by adequate staff recruitment and training.

UN Prison Incident Management Handbook

'Prison staff members need to understand that interacting with prisoners in a humane and equitable way enhances the security and good order of a prison. (…) Irrespective of staffing ratios, each contact between staff and prisoners reinforces the relationship between the two, which should be a positive one, based on dignity and mutual respect in how people treat each other, and in compliance with international human rights principles and due process.'[15]

Examples of dynamic security are found, for example, in so-called direct supervision prisons in the United States. These are organised into small, decentralised living units, with staff working in direct contact with prisoners, rather than in control rooms or towers. Comparative research has shown that without greater spending on buildings or staffing, this kind of facility reduces levels of assaults and other serious infractions, and provides settings that are less stressful and more accessible to counselling and rehabilitation programmes.[16] In short, they are more likely to provide both safety and dignity.

The revised Standard Minimum Rules acknowledge the concept of dynamic security, encouraging prison administrations to use, to the extent possible, conflict prevention, mediation or any other alternative dispute resolution mechanism to prevent disciplinary offences and to resolve conflicts. They also require training on security and safety, including on the concept of dynamic security, with due consideration of preventive and defusing techniques, such as negotiation and mediation.[17]

3. The relationship between dignity and security in detention

Security and dignity in places of detention are interdependent. 'Not only are prisons and human dignity compatible, they must be compatible'.[18]

Security and control are best ensured in environments that respect the inherent dignity of detainees. As the International Centre for Prison Studies pointed out, '[i] t is quite wrong to suggest that treating prisoners with humanity and fairness will lead to a reduction in security or control.' In fact, fairness and legitimacy are not only critical to wellbeing in prisons, but have demonstrable effects on order.[19] When detainees' rights are respected, it is more likely that they will acknowledge the legitimacy and authority of prison staff, reducing the risk of tensions and disorder. Research in UK prisons suggests that prisoners experience order and safety along with fairness, respect and humanity as what matters most in prison life.[20]

At the same time, certain security practices and measures can by their nature be intrusive and restrictive, limiting the enjoyment of detainees' rights. Security concerns may be overemphasised to the detriment of the dignity of detainees; measures taken in the name of security may be disproportionate or even excessive; the manner in which they are implemented can be brutal or oppressive and/or applied in a systematic manner without consideration of whether or not the individual poses an actual risk.

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14. Principle XXIII, Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR), Principles and Best Practices on the Protection of People Deprived of Liberty in the Americas.

15. United Nations, *Prison Incident Management Handbook,* 2013, pp21, 22.

16. Wener R E, The effectiveness of direct supervision correctional design and management: A review of the literature, *Criminal Justice and Behaviour* 33, 2006, pp367-391.

17. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 38 and 76.

18. Andrew Coyle, 'Prisons and human dignity: are they compatible?' A paper delivered at the 6th worldwide conference of the International Prison Chaplains' Association, Stockholm, 21 August 2010, p8.

19. Alison Liebling, 'Moral performance, inhuman and degrading treatment and prison pain', *Punishment and Society* 13, 2011, p533.

20. *Ibid.*

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The challenge for prison administrations is to maintain security while safeguarding the human rights and dignity of the persons deprived of liberty. Policies, for example in the format of a code of conduct, should be in place in order to authoritatively guide prison administration and staff when implementing measures in the name of security. Moreover, contingency planning should be conducted in order to establish appropriate procedures and behaviour of personnel in different scenarios, and allow for prison staff to be trained accordingly.

UN Prison Incident Management Handbook:

'Contingency plans need to clearly detail and describe the nature and extent of authorized use of force to address the incident. Key aspects of contingency planning include:

- roles, responsibilities and chain of command for key prison staff and external support personnel (police, fire services, medical services, etc.) are explicit, and mutually agreed-upon and understood;
- joint training and simulation exercises are conducted with police and other external support;
- detailed processes are outlined to effectively respond to a particular incident;
- communication linkages between the prison and external support are provided for, before, during and after the incident.'[21]

It is important for bodies monitoring places of detention to enquire whether and which protocols exist and how they balance security and dignity.

4. Legality, necessity and proportionality of security measures

Limitations or other encroachments of rights may be legitimate; however, they must fulfil all three of the following criteria established under international law.

- **Legality** – the measure must be provided for by laws that are in conformity with international human rights standards.
- **Necessity** – other means must have proven incapable of maintaining order or security.
- **Proportionality** – the measure taken must be the least intrusive to achieve the objective of maintaining order and security and be imposed for the shortest duration.

However, in the context of security procedures applied in places of detention, these principles are often neither enshrined in laws and policies, nor observed in practice. Security measures are also regularly applied based on vague possibilities rather than concrete indication of their necessity, or applied in a systematic manner without individual risk assessment. Furthermore, in the context of public pressure and 'tough on crimes policies', the boundaries of necessity and proportionality may be pushed.

For example in many countries, without regard to the presumption of innocence, detainees who are under investigation or subject to pre-trial detention may be subject to regimes even more restrictive than those for convicted prisoners.

Clear rules and regulations are needed governing matters such as the use of force, instruments of restraint, body searches, disciplinary sanctions and any other schemes applied in the name of security. Moreover, the application of such measures should be documented in order to allow for scrutiny, including through an independent complaints mechanism. Policies and procedures should be reviewed on a regular basis, and they should be published in line with established good practice on transparency.

Monitoring bodies should examine these regulations and should inquire what security levels are applied in the respective place of detention, what they imply and how detainees are classified for allocation to such security levels. They should also request information on who takes decisions relating to classification and the application of security measures such as body searches, instruments of restraint, use of force or solitary confinement, on what criteria these decisions are based, who oversees their application, and whether and how they are documented.

5. Public attitudes and societal context

Over the last decade, in many countries there has been a growing perception of insecurity by the general public that has led to an increased demand for a more repressive response by state authorities.

While this does not always reflect the reality – crime has been falling in many Western countries for example – there has been increased pressure to get 'tough on crime'. Be it the fight against terrorism,[22] drug trafficking, organised crime,[23] crimes against or by children, high profile media cases in particular have resulted in a call for expanded competences for law enforcement, longer prison sentences and the rights of detainees to be restricted. These have even included an erosion of the prohibition of torture.[24]

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21. United Nations, *Prison Incident Management Handbook,* 2013, p32.

22. See, inter alia, Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), *Defusing the ticking bomb scenario: why we must always say no to torture, always,* 2007; Jean Maria Arrigo, 'A utilitarian argument against torture interrogation of terrorists,' *Science and Engineering Ethics* 10, 2004, pp543-572.

23. See, for instance, a recent report on the situation in Mexico: *'In the name of the fight against crime': study of the torture phenomenon in Mexico.* Available (in French) at http://unmondetortionnaire.com/IMG/pdf/Rapport_Mexique.pdf <accessed 17 October 2013>

24. See ACAT France, Annual Report 2010, 'Les écrans de la torture' by Jean-Etienne Linarés, pp273-290.

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The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has reiterated that 'this climate of fear, in which the media and political discourse convey the idea that human rights are a way of protecting criminals, can bring as a consequence a certain social acceptance of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Experience has shown over the past years that resorting to torture, to arbitrary detentions, and to repressive legislation and practices, has not been effective in responding to the justified demand for citizen security'.[25]

In general, public opinion appears at best to be indifferent to the situation in prisons or at worst to consider that 'criminals' get the treatment they deserve. Public attitudes often call for harsh treatment and regimes in detention, not factoring in that imprisonment itself constitutes the sanction handed down by courts and should not be compounded by inhumane treatment or abuse in prison.

Such narratives ignore the fact that in many countries a high proportion of prisoners are held on remand, pending trial, to be presumed – and often found – innocent, and that in most countries a high proportion are imprisoned for minor, non-violent offences. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that providing adequate conditions of detention and meaningful preparation for release have a direct impact on the social reintegration of inmates and consequently on the security of the general population.[26] Such public attitudes are rarely countered by political actors or authorities, however.[27]

25. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Report on the human rights of persons deprived of liberty in the Americas,* 2011, para.364.

26. See, for instance, UNODC, *Introductory handbook on the prevention of recidivism and the social reintegration of offenders,* 2012.

27. An exception is Georgia where following the exposure of torture in September 2012, a large-scale amnesty was applied and a penal reform strategy introduced.

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Risk factors deriving from an overemphasis on security

Security measures form an integral part of the daily reality for detainees when they enter prisons, go to the courtyard or work, interact with staff or receive visits from relatives. The way in which security is managed in prisons, and its impact on the dignity of detainees, will differ from institution to institution and may be the subject of detailed assessment by monitoring bodies.

This section does not provide an exhaustive list of how approaches to security can impact on dignity in prisons, but seeks to identify certain common security practices and measures, which involve a particular risk of infringement upon the dignity of detainees.

1. Institution in charge of prisons

The nature of the institution in charge of prisons has a direct impact on how security is managed within it. Where prisons and the penitentiary service are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, military institutional culture can result in an overemphasis on discipline and security with prisoners seen as enemies.[28] To a lesser extent, this can also be true when the prison service is run by the Ministry of Interior, given the measures of value, behaviour patterns and role of police officers in the criminal justice system. The rather military culture of these institutions is commonly reflected in their structure, hierarchy, training programmes, employment conditions, mandate and the self-image of staff in prisons under their responsibility.

Recognising this risk, one of the measures required for accession to the Council of Europe by former Soviet countries, therefore, was the transfer of the penitentiary service from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice.[29] The UN Committee against Torture has made a similar recommendation, 'permitting the demilitarization of the penitentiary system'.[30]

The separation of the functions of investigation and prosecution on the one side, and of execution and supervision of criminal sanctions on the other, has proven to be an important factor in the humanisation of prison systems. The revised UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners reflect this observation and call for professional prison officers who 'have civil service status with security of tenure subject only to good conduct, efficiency and physical fitness'.[31]

New Prison Service in Honduras

On December 2012, Honduras adopted a National Penitentiary Law that addressed a systemic structural deficiency in the prison system in the country – the lack of a proper regulatory framework.[32] The Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture had recommended in 2010 the adoption of a prison policy that sets out a comprehensive plan for the establishment of an autonomous structure, independent of the police and capable of carrying out the duties and tasks that are vital to its purposes.[33] While until then the National Police was the institution in charge of prison administration, the reform created an autonomous institution, the National Penitentiary Institute, linked to the Ministry of Interior and Population and established a specialised professional civil service career for prison staff and guards.

Prison management requires very distinct skills from those of policing, and experience across the globe has confirmed that rehabilitation of offenders has a far higher prospect of success if allocated to judicial authorities rather than police. The civilian control of the Ministry of Justice is therefore considered to be more compatible with the rehabilitative aim of imprisonment and the need to ensure human rights of detainees.[34]

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28. See PRI/APT, *Institutional culture in detention: a framework for preventive monitoring,* 2nd edition, 2015.

29. For example, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Opinion No. 193 (1996) on Russia's request for membership of the Council of Europe, para.7x, 25 January 1996.

30. Committee Against Torture (CAT), *Concluding observations on Kazakhstan,* A/56/44(SUPPL), para.129(a).

31. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 74(3).

32. See recommendation by the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) following its 20 September 2009 visit to Honduras, CAT/OP/HDN/1, para. 212c.

33. Report on the visit of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) to Honduras, 10 February 2010, CAT/OP/HND/1.

34. PRI/APT, *Institutional culture in detention: a framework for preventive monitoring*, 2nd edition, 2015.

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Kazakhstan: Double transfer of authority

In 2001, Kazakhstan reported to the UN Committee against Torture the transfer of authority for the penitentiary system to the Ministry of Justice as one of the main achievements of legal reform at that time. In its concluding observations, adopted on 17 May 2011, the UN Committee against Torture recommended Kazakhstan to 'complete the transfer of responsibilities for prisons from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice, thereby permitting the demilitarization of the penitentiary system.'[35]

Allegations of torture and ill-treatment raised by monitoring bodies until then were concentrated in facilities under the responsibility of the Ministry for the Interior, in isolation cells of temporary detention and cells in police stations. Following the transfer of authority in 2002, the prison population decreased, with Kazakhstan slipping from 3rd highest place in the ranking of global prison populations in 2001 to 22nd place in 2010. Public control over prisons was enhanced and significant progress was made with regard to dealing with the problem of tuberculosis in prisons.

However, on 26 July 2011 Kazakhstan revoked this transfer of authority by Presidential Decree 'On the Penitentiary System'.

Monitoring bodies should enquire whether and to what extent the culture of the ministry responsible for prisons, its hierarchy, training and self-image impacts on the treatment of prisoners and the security measures applied. When interacting with prison authorities, they should stress the distinct roles of policing and investigation of offences and the management of a penal institution. They should also highlight the presumption of innocence for pre-trial detainees and the benefits of a rehabilitative rather than punitive penitentiary system.

2. Over-classification

Prison systems in almost all countries operate some form of classification. The revised UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners define two purposes for classification: the first to separate from others those prisoners who, by reason of their criminal record or background, are likely to exercise a bad influence; and the second to divide the prisoners into classes in order to facilitate their treatment with a view to social rehabilitation. The Rules also state that 'so far as possible separate institutions or separate sections of an institution shall be used for the treatment of the different classes of prisoners.'[36] Information on the initial assessment and classification reports should be entered in the prisoner file management system.[37]

Given the diversity of a prison's population, the same level of security is not applicable to all prisoners in one institution. A one-size-fits-all approach does not improve prison security nor does it contribute to the objective of prisoner rehabilitation. Individual classification of prisoners should take place as soon as possible after admission. However, the classification system should be flexible in order to allow prison officials to adapt to situational changes. Classification should avoid imposing a high security regime 'to be on the safe side'.

In every country, there is likely to be a small number of prisoners who are considered to present a particularly high security risk and who may require special conditions of detention. These prisoners may need to be held in a special security unit where their movements and activities are (highly) restricted.

However, prisoners are frequently over-classified and subject to regimes more restrictive than required. Often classification is based solely on the nature of the offence committed, rather than individualised and taking into account the background of the offence and other factors. In particular, prisoners on death row and those serving a life sentence are frequently subject to harsh security regimes based only on the nature of their sentence rather than on any risk they may in fact represent to other prisoners or staff.

Risk assessments often wrongly perceive prisoners' needs as 'risk factors'. A prisoner who displays symptoms of depression or another mental health issue may receive a higher security classification, which can lead to greater isolation. Instead, mental health issues require a holistic programme in a lower security setting.

In some jurisdictions, authorities may have limited choices for placing detainees in appropriate facilities and low-risk detainees may be over-classified because the adequate facility is overcrowded or located a long distance away from their home, family and friends.

Due to the generally lower security risk they pose, some countries have established separate security categorisation arrangements for women, for children under the age of 18 or for young adult offenders. However, in other countries women tend to be over-classified and made subject to levels of security that are not justified.

35. Committee against Torture, *Concluding observations on Kazakhstan,* 17 May 2011, A/56/44(SUPPL).
36. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 93 and 94.
37. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 8 (b).

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Discrimination against women during classification

In Thailand, according to a 2013 report, some male prisons were reported to house a small number of women inmates in a separate section. Only one male officer was responsible for classification and women were often uncomfortable with sharing information with a male prison guard.[38]

The Australian Human Rights Commission reported in 2012 that due to the lack of a sufficient number of women's prisons, female prisoners were being detained in maximum security prisons with male prisoners, increasing the risk of abuse.[39]

UNODC reported in 2007 that in Afghanistan the same methods for classification were used for men and women. Information about a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse and parental responsibility was not addressed or recorded, and therefore procedures did not provide information essential for enabling adequate classification of women prisoners.[40]

A proper classification system is needed to categorise prisoners based on well-defined criteria, such as the exceptionally grave nature of the offence,[41] or persistently dangerous behaviour and attitudes that represent a serious threat to staff or other detainees.

Decisions to place prisoners in highly restrictive settings should only be made after a thorough and structured assessment of risk and a judgement that this risk cannot be managed in other ways. It should involve a detailed analysis of a prisoner's current offence, its nature, seriousness, pattern of previous offences and disciplinary, escape and incident history. It should also take into account personal and situational factors, such as age, gender, vulnerability, family and community support. Risk assessments should make use of the best available information gathered from documents and interviews, and ensure that decisions are not compromised by cultural, gender or social bias.

Risk assessment instruments should be used to develop an individualised implementation of a sentence and be periodically repeated to allow for a dynamic re-assessment of the detainee's risk. The decision should be appropriately documented in order to facilitate effective oversight. A recommendation by the Council of Europe concerning dangerous prisoners further suggests assessments be linked to opportunities for offenders to address their needs and change their attitudes and behaviour, and for the offender to be involved in the assessment. Another recommendation emphasises the need to differentiate between the offender's risk to the outside community and inside prison.[42]

For women prisoners, the UN Bangkok Rules require that prison administrators develop and implement classification methods addressing the gender-specific needs and circumstances of women prisoners to ensure appropriate and individualised planning and implementation towards early rehabilitation, treatment and reintegration into society.[43]

3. Instruments of restraint

In order to maintain order and security, detaining authorities may resort to instruments of physical restraint such as handcuffs, ankle cuffs, body belts, strait jackets or electro-shock devices.

However, some instruments of restraint are prohibited explicitly by international law. The prohibition of the use of restraints that are 'inherently degrading or painful', such as chains or irons and body-worn electro-shock devices, derives from the general prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and has been enshrined in the revised Standard Minimum Rules (2015).[44]

Body-worn electro-shock belts, sleeves or cuffs, which encircle parts of the subject's body (usually the waist, but variants have been developed to fit on legs or arms) and deliver an electric shock when a remote control device is activated, have been found to inflict pain and mental suffering by their very nature, as well as to have a humiliating and degrading effect. Consequently, they have been increasingly condemned. The UN Committee against Torture has recommended the abolition of electro-shock stun belts and restraint chairs as methods of restraining those in custody, noting that their use often violates Article 16 of the Convention against Torture.[45] The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) opposes the 'use of electric stun belts for controlling the movement of detained persons, whether inside or outside places of deprivation of liberty.'[46]

The use of other physical restraints is legitimate only if lawful, necessary and proportionate.[47] They should

38. UNODC, East-Asia Pacific Regional Meeting on the Implementation of the Bangkok Rules, Bangkok, 19 to 21 February 2013, UNODC/JSDO/BKEGM/2013/1, 14 March 2013, paras.39, 47.

39. Australian Human Rights Commission, *Australian Study Tour Report*, Visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, 10-20 April 2012, p4.

40. Tomris Atabay/UNODC, *Afghanistan: female prisoners and their social reintegration,* March 2007, p74.

41. However, the placement should not be based exclusively on the prisoner's sentence but on an individual risk assessment, see for example European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) report on its 2011 visit to Serbia, CPT/Inf (2012) 17, p32.

42. Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning dangerous offenders, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 February 2014 at the 1192nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

43. Rule 40 and 41, United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 21 December 2010, A/RES/65/229.

44. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 47 (1).

45. Committee against Torture, for example, *Concluding observations on United States of America,* A/55/44, May 2000, para.180c.

46. 20th Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), para.74, CPT (2011) CPT Standards CPT/Inf/E (2002) 1 – Rev. 2011.

47. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by General Assembly resolution 34/169 of 17 December 1979, Article 3.

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only be applied in exceptional circumstances, when no other options are available, in order to prevent the detainee from inflicting injuries to others or themselves, or to prevent escape during a transfer, for the shortest possible period of time. Where the use of an instrument of restraint is authorised by law, they should be imposed only when no lesser form of control would be effective in addressing the risks posed by unrestricted movement, and the least intrusive method that is necessary and reasonably available should be used.[48]

Restraints must not cause humiliation or degradation, and must be ended/removed as soon as the risk ceases. They should not be applied as a disciplinary measure,[49] and are usually an inadequate means of preventing suicide or self-harm among prisoners. Measures involving regular monitoring of such prisoners and provision of mental healthcare as well as meaningful activities are preferable. The revised Standard Minimum Rules encourage control techniques that obviate the need for the imposition of instruments of restraint or reduce their intrusiveness.[50]

Reduction in the use of shackles in Thailand

In May 2013 the government of Thailand announced that they had put an end to the practice of shackling all death row inmates at the highest security prison in Thailand, Bangkwang prison in Nontaburi Province. Death row prisoners had to wear leg irons weighing up to 5 kilograms for 24 hours a day, including for sleeping, bathing, eating or praying. On the day the announcement about unshackling was made, a detainee of the prison said 'Prisoners are not animals. They should not be chained because of their wrongdoing. They already were punished by being in jail'. In other prisons in Thailand, detainees can be shackled on reception or as a punishment. The government said there are plans to remove all shackles in all prisons all over Thailand.[51]

Under international law, the use of restraints for juveniles is limited strictly to exceptional, specified cases.[52] Furthermore, the use of instruments of restraint is prohibited for women during labour, during birth and immediately after birth.[53]

Clear provisions should be in place, prescribing the above parameters, including strictly defined cases of use. The application of instruments of restraint should be subject to authorisation by the director and be recorded.

Means of restraint should not be used in a routine manner, but employed only on a case-by-case basis following an individual risk assessment. In this regard, routinely handcuffing detainees within a prison for all out-of-cell movement is not justified by security considerations. Even where the use of restraints is necessary and proportionate in a given situation, the manner in which they are employed may give reason for concern, for example if handcuffs are purposely tightened in a way that harms the detainee.

Use of handcuffs in Maldives

'The delegation also heard several accounts of use of handcuffs in a particularly humiliating and painful way, for purposes of punishment and control. The delegation is also concerned about the alleged use of restraints as a security measure to respond to incidents. The SPT emphasizes that discipline and order should be maintained with no more restriction than is necessary for safe custody and well-ordered prison life. Instruments of restraints, such as handcuffs, should never be applied as punishment. The SPT recommends that the practice of using handcuffs as a means of punishment be eliminated immediately.' (Report on the visit of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture to the Maldives, CAT/OP/MDV/1, 26 February 2009, para. 207)

Monitoring bodies should assess whether and which regulations and procedures are in place, setting out the circumstances of the use of instruments of restraint and specific safeguards against abuse. They should establish whether instruments prohibited under international law are explicitly forbidden, and whether the use of restraints is applied consistently with the principles of necessity and proportionality, rather than on a routine basis. Monitoring bodies should also enquire whether training, before entering duty and in-service training, covers the use of instruments of restraint, but also control techniques that enable them to avoid their use, including preventive and defusing techniques, such as negotiation and mediation.[54]

4. Body searches

Searches of various kinds are a necessary and legitimate means of preventing prisoners from having access to dangerous or prohibited items or substances, which may constitute a threat to the safety and health of staff, other prisoners and visitors.

However, when conducted routinely, in a disproportionate, humiliating or discriminatory way, searches infringe upon the dignity of detainees and can amount to inhuman or

48. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 47 Rules 47(2) and 48; Principle 9, Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

49. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 43(2).

50. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 49.

51. See 'The story of a lese majeste prisoner', *Bangkok Post*, 21 July 2013, http://m.bangkokpost.com/opinion/360858 and 'Thailand starts phasing out shackles in prisons', *BBC News*, 16 May 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22555030 <accessed 23 September 2013>

52. Article 64, United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.

53. Rule 24, United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), see also Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 48(2).

54. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 49 and 76.

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degrading treatment. There is also a risk that searches, including cell searches, are used as a means of intimidation or retaliation against certain detainees.

Body searches are usually applied at the time of admission, before and/or after physical contact with relatives or even legal representatives,[55] when ordering placement in a segregation cell or after exercise, workshops or following meals in the refectory.

However, there are often no rules governing searches, and in a large number of prisons, officers can search prisoners, their cells and possessions at any time.

There are various kinds of body searches. A pat down, rub down or frisk search represents a search of person's outer clothing by a person running his/her hands along the outer clothes. Prison staff may ask the prisoner to take off their shoes and empty their pockets, and may check in their mouth, nose, ears and hair. By contrast, a full body or strip search refers to the removal or rearrangement of some or all of a person's clothing so as to permit a visual inspection of a person's private areas, without physical contact. Lastly, invasive body searches involve a physical inspection of the detainee's genital or anal regions.

The humiliating and traumatising effect of invasive body searches, in particular strip searches and cavity searches, has been widely recognised. As for women, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women described their improper touching during searches carried out by male prison staff as 'sanctioned sexual harassment'.[56]

Strip searches of women prisoners in Australia

In 2012 the Special Rapporteur on violence against women reported that many Australian prisons require women to undergo highly invasive and often traumatic strip searches. A prisoner from Farlea Prison reported: 'We are strip searched after every visit. We are naked, told to bend over, touch our toes, spread our cheeks. If we've got our period we have to take the tampon out in front of them. It's degrading and humiliating. When we do urines it's even worse, we piss in a bottle in front of them. If we can't or won't we lose visits for three weeks.'[57]

The revised Standard Minimum Rules have introduced, for the first time, standards on searches of prisoners and cells, as well as searches of visitors.[58]

Wherever possible, alternatives to body searches, such as scans and metal detectors, should be developed and used to replace strip searches and body cavity searches, and appropriate training should be provided to staff.[59]

Clear and strict regulations and procedures should be in place governing the use of body searches, in order to avoid abuse. They should specify when searches are allowed, based on the criteria of necessity, reasonableness and proportionality, and the principle of 'last resort' for intrusive searches. Alternatives should be applied wherever possible.[60] For example, if there is suspicion that a prisoner is concealing an illegal item in his/her body, alternatives include modern scanning technology or making arrangements to keep the prisoners under close supervision until such time as any forbidden item is expelled from the body.[61]

Vaginal examinations in Greece

Prisoners in Greece who refused a vaginal examination on arrival to prison were placed in segregation for several days and forced to take laxatives. On the occasion of a visit of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) in January 2011, authorities claimed that these types of searches had been ended, and were only undertaken in exceptional circumstances and by trained doctors. However, during their visit the CPT found the practice was still ongoing in Greek prisons.[62]

Regulations should also specify the modalities of their conduct. Most importantly, body searches should preserve the right to privacy and dignity, should be undertaken in a sensitive way, and never be used to harass, intimidate or unnecessarily intrude upon a prisoner's privacy.[63] Prisoners should never be completely naked, but the search should be conducted in private and in two steps (first upper and then lower body), avoiding physical contact in order to avoid humiliation. Staff should explain exactly what will happen before they give a full body search. Strip searches and body cavity searches should require authorisation by the supervisor on duty.[64]

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55. It has to be noted that authorities – and hence monitoring bodies – must take into account not only the risk of families voluntarily introducing prohibited items but also situations where they are forced to do so by other inmates' families or criminal groups outside the place of detention.

56. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women of the mission to the United States of America on the issue of violence against women in state and federal prisons, 4 January 1999, E/CN.4/1999/68/Add.2, paras.55, 58.

57. Australian Human Rights Committee, *Australian Study Tour Report*, Visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, 10-20 April 2012, p16.

58. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 51-53 (prisoner) and Rule 60 (visitors).

59. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 51-53 (prisoner) and Rule 60 (visitors).

60. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 52.

61. In 2011, the government of Argentina decided to install detectors to control the entry of visitors in prisons. These are not all installed yet. See CELS Derechos humanos en Argentina, *informe 2012*, p231.

62. PRI, *Guidance Document on the United Nations Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders* (the Bangkok Rules), 2013, p61, footnote 208.

63. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 51.

64. Bangkok Rules, Commentary to Rule 19, see PRI, *Guidance Document on the United Nations Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders* (the Bangkok Rules), 2013, p63.

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Detainees should only be searched by a staff member of the same gender, as emphasised by the revised Standard Minimum Rules,[65] UN Bangkok Rules,[66] the Human Rights Committee,[67] in Rule 54(5) of the European Prison Rules,[68] and in the standards developed by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.[69]

For the purposes of accountability, appropriate records of searches must be kept, and should include the reasons for the search, the identities of those who conducted it, and any results of the search.[70]

Annual report of the French NPM (searches)

The 2011 annual report of the French NPM, the General Controller of Places of Deprivation of Liberty, contains a whole section devoted to the issue of searches in prisons. The thorough analysis covers factual data as well as a review of the legal basis and its development. It also includes a broader sociological perspective on the use of searches in prisons. 'The conclusion to draw from all this data is simple: staff attachment to systematic searches is legitimate in view of their ability to maintain order in prisons. However, it is only a last resort (…). The key to a justified – and hence limited – use of strip searches lies in the manner in which prison staff is able to distinguish the real troublemakers (a minority) from the others. (…) This will not require new analysis of the 'dangerousness' of individuals but rather a careful and daily observation of the life of detainees.'[71]

Standards of medical ethics emphasise that the 'physician's obligation to provide medical care to the prisoner should not be compromised by an obligation to participate in the prison's security system'[72] and therefore, involvement in 'any professional relationship with prisoners or detainees the purpose of which is not solely to evaluate, protect or improve their physical and mental health' is in contravention of medical ethics for health personnel.[73] It is therefore recommended that body cavity searches are performed by medically trained staff who are not part of the regular health-care service of the prison or by prison staff with sufficient medical knowledge and skills to safely perform the search.[74]

Considering the high risk of abuse during searches, in particular body searches, monitoring bodies need to analyse carefully the reasons why such searches are conducted, whether they are based on individual risk assessments or constitute a routine, disproportionate policy. They should also carefully assess how the searches are carried out in practice.[75]

5. Isolation and solitary confinement

Solitary confinement is a term used to describe the physical isolation of individuals by confinement to their cell for twenty-two to twenty-four hours a day. In many jurisdictions prisoners under such regimes are allowed out of their cells for one hour of solitary exercise. Meaningful contact with other people is typically reduced to a minimum. The reduction in stimuli in such a prison regime is not only quantitative but also qualitative. Usually the available stimuli and the occasional social contacts are seldom freely chosen, are generally monotonous, and are often not empathetic.'[76]

In the security context, solitary confinement is applied in three main ways in prison settings. During pre-trial detention, solitary confinement is often used as a technique for 'softening-up' detainees before and between interrogation sessions. For sentenced prisoners, it is applied as a disciplinary punishment; as a way of managing specific groups of prisoners considered to pose a high risk; and as a way to (allegedly) 'protect' prisoners from violence by other detainees. This justification is often used for placing persons with mental disabilities or illnesses, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) detainees in solitary

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65. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 52(1).

66. Rule 19 of the UN Bangkok Rules: 'Effective measures shall be taken to ensure that prisoners' dignity and respect are protected during personal searches, which shall only be carried out by women staff who have been properly trained in appropriate searching methods and in accordance with established procedures'. For body searches on LGBTI detainees see PRI/APT, *LGBTI persons deprived of their liberty: A framework for preventive monitoring,* 2nd edition, 2015.

67. Human Rights Committee in General Comment 16 on Article 17 of the ICCPR, para. 8: '(…) So far as personal and body search is concerned, effective measures should ensure that such searches are carried out in a manner consistent with the dignity of the person who is being searched. Persons being subjected to body search by State officials, or medical personnel acting at the request of the State, should only be examined by persons of the same sex'.

68. Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Prison Rules, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 January 2006.

69. CPT Standards, para. 26.: '(…), the CPT wishes to stress that, regardless of their age, persons deprived of their liberty should only be searched by staff of the same gender and that any search which requires an inmate to undress should be conducted out of the sight of custodial staff of the opposite gender; these principles apply a fortiori in respect of juveniles'.

70. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 51. For more detail, see PRI/APT, *Detention Monitoring Tool:* Factsheet on body searches, 2nd edition, 2015.

71. Le Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté, *Rapport d'activité* 2011, 2012.

72. WMA Statement on Body Searches of Prisoners, adopted by the 45th World Medical Assembly, Budapest, Hungary, October 1993, and editorially revised by the 170th WMA Council Session, Divonne-les-Bains, France, May 2005.

73. Principle 3 of the Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

74. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 51(2).

75. See, for example, the thorough analysis on searches carried out by the French National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in its 2011 annual report, p238-256. Le Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté, *Rapport d'activité* 2011, 2012.

76. The Istanbul Protocol on the use and effects of solitary confinement, adopted on 9. December 2007 at the International Psychological Trauma Symposium, Istanbul.

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confinement.[77] Political detainees deemed to be a threat to national security are also sometimes held in this way.[78]

In the absence of sufficient numbers of staff, solitary confinement can seem an easier way of managing challenging prisoners rather than providing the supervision and control required.

In the past decade, there has been an increase in large-scale solitary confinement in the form of 'super-max prisons' (see Section 6). Other prisons have introduced 'small group isolation' where prisoners classified as dangerous or high risk are held in small high security units, and are only allowed limited association with one to five others at designated times, typically during the one-hour long outdoor exercise period.

Special Disciplinary Regime in Brazil

In Brazil, a form of solitary confinement called the Special Disciplinary Regime (RDD – Regime disciplinar diferenciado) is used as a disciplinary measure in response to infractions committed by detainees considered as dangerous. RDD can be applied for up to one sixth of the sentence. The worst conditions are observed in RDD within federal prisons: detainees are held in their cell 24 hours a day under constant camera surveillance, with no access to TV, radio or newspapers. They can receive two visitors per week but without any physical contact.[79]

Isolation and solitary confinement constitute a high-risk situation for human rights abuse. Because of the absence of witnesses, it increases the risk of torture or other ill-treatment going unnoticed and undetected. Prolonged solitary confinement can in itself amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,[80] and has been found to have significant adverse health effects. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has called for a ban on prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement as incompatible with the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment[81] and as a 'harsh' measure, which is contrary to rehabilitation, the aim of the penitentiary system.[82] Medical research confirms that the denial of meaningful human contact can cause 'isolation syndrome' the symptoms of which include anxiety, depression, anger, cognitive disturbances, perceptual distortions, paranoia, psychosis, self-harm and suicide, and can destroy a person's personality.[83]

Istanbul statement on the use and effects of solitary confinement

'Solitary confinement may cause serious psychological and sometimes physiological ill effects. A long list of symptoms ranging from insomnia and confusion to hallucinations and psychosis has been documented. Negative health effects can occur after only a few days in solitary confinement, and the health risks rise with each additional day spent in such conditions. (…) The central harmful feature of solitary confinement is that it reduces meaningful social contact to a level of social and psychological stimulus that many will experience as insufficient to sustain health and well-being.'[84]

For these reasons, a significant body of international law has developed that requires restriction of the use of solitary confinement,[85] and an absolute prohibition on the use of solitary confinement has been enshrined for juveniles,[86] and for pregnant women, women with infants and breastfeeding mothers in prison.[87]

The Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners commit to 'efforts towards the abolition of solitary confinement or the reduction of its use'.[88] The Istanbul Statement on the use and effects of solitary confinement, the European Prison Rules[89] and the Principles and Best Practices on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas reiterate that solitary confinement should be used only in very exceptional cases, as a last resort and for as short a time as possible, 'when it is evident that it is necessary to ensure legitimate interests relating to the institution's internal security, and to protect fundamental rights, such as the right to life and integrity of persons deprived of liberty or the personnel'.[90]

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77. See PRI/APT, *LGBTI persons deprived of their liberty: a framework for preventive monitoring,* 2nd edition, 2015.

78. Sharon Shalev, *A sourcebook on solitary confinement,* Mannheim Centre for Criminology, London School of Economics, 2008.

79. Pastoral carceraria do Brasil/Association for the Prevention of Torture. *Situaçao das Pessoas Privadas de Liberdade no Brasil – Informaçao Preliminar para Audiencia da Comissao Interamericana de Direitos Humanos*, 20 October 2012.

80. Special Rapporteur on Torture, *Report to the UN General Assembly,* 5 August 2011, A/66/268.

81. Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, 5 August 2011, A/66/268. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has made comparable recommendations: CPT 21st General report, 1 August 2010 – July 2011, November 2011.

82. First interim report to the General Assembly on 18 October 2011, A/RES/65/205 at para.79 (noting that: 'that solitary confinement is a harsh measure which may cause serious psychological and physiological adverse effects on individuals regardless of their specific conditions').

83. Grassian S, 'Psychiatric effects of solitary confinement', *Journal of Law and Policy* 22, 2007, pp325-383; Haney C, 'Mental health issues in long-term solitary and 'supermax' confinement', *Crime & Delinquency* 49(1) pp124-156, 2003; Shalev S, *A sourcebook on solitary confinement,* Mannheim Centre for Criminology, London School of Economics, 2008.

84. The Istanbul Protocol on the use and effects of solitary confinement, adopted on 9 December 2007 at the International Psychological Trauma Symposium, Istanbul.

85. See, for example, Principle 7 of the Basic Principles; the Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 20.

86. Rule 67, UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.

87. Rule 22, UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).

88. Principle 7, UN Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, 1990.

89. European Prison Rules, Rule 60(5): 'Solitary confinement shall be imposed as a punishment only in exceptional cases and for a specified period of time, which shall be as short as possible'.

90. Principle XXII (3) of the Principles and Best Practices on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas.

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Inspired by these developments, the revised Standard Minimum Rules have incorporated explicit restrictions on the use of solitary confinement, regardless of whether it is imposed as a disciplinary sanction or for the maintenance of order and security.[91]

Regardless of its duration, the revised Standard Minimum Rules require authorisation by law or regulation of 'any form of involuntary separation from the general prison population,(…) including policies and procedures governing the use and review of, admission to and release from any form of involuntary separation'.[92]

Beyond this general requirement of a legal basis, concrete restrictions and procedural safeguards have been put in place for solitary confinement, which the Rules define as 'confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact'.[93]

Absolute prohibitions apply for the indefinite and prolonged use of solitary confinement, with 'prolonged' defined as 'a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days'.[94] The prohibitions included in other UN standards regarding children, pregnant women, women with infants and breastfeeding mothers are reiterated in the revised Standard Minimum Rules.[95] A prohibition has also been incorporated for 'prisoners with mental or physical disabilities when their conditions would be exacerbated by such measures'. It is worth noting in this context that an absolute prohibition of solitary confinement for persons with mental illness has been recommended by the Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement,[96] which was reiterated by the Special Rapporteur on Torture[97] and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.[98]

Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture[99]

Research has shown that solitary confinement often results in severe exacerbation of a previously existing mental condition. Prisoners with mental health issues deteriorate dramatically in isolation. The adverse effects of solitary confinement are especially significant for persons with serious mental health problems which are usually characterized by psychotic symptoms and/or significant functional impairments. Some engage in extreme acts of self-mutilation and even suicide.

Furthermore, the revised Standard Minimum Rules emphasise that solitary confinement shall not be applied by virtue of a prisoner's sentence, as is the case in some countries, for example for prisoners on death row or lifers.[100]

Where no absolute prohibition applies, solitary confinement should still be imposed only 'in exceptional cases as a last resort, for as short a time as possible and subject to independent review, and only pursuant to the authorization by a competent authority'.[101]

Regardless of the circumstances of isolation, efforts should be made to raise the level of meaningful social contacts for prisoners.[102] This is acknowledged by the revised Standard Minimum Rules, which require prison administrations to take the necessary measures to alleviate the potential detrimental effects where prisoners are or have been separated from the general prison population.[103] This means that prisoners must have meaningful social contact with others, for example by raising the level of staff-prisoner contact, allowing access to social activities with other prisoners and more visits, arranging in-depth talks with psychologists, psychiatrists, volunteers of NGOs, from the local community, or religious prison personnel, if so wished by the detainee. Regular contact with family members through visits, letters, phone calls or emails are crucial for detainees. The provision of meaningful in cell and out of cell activities, such as educational, recreational and/or vocational programmes, are equally important to prevent infringements of the right to dignity and health, and will have a positive effect on levels of violence.

The role of health-care personnel has also been clarified in the revised Standard Minimum Rules. While required to pay 'particular attention to the health of prisoners held under any form of involuntary separation, including by visiting such prisoners on a daily basis' they 'shall not have any role in the imposition of disciplinary sanctions or other restrictive measures'. Health-care personnel should report adverse effects of such measures to the director of the facility, without delay, and have the authority to review and recommend changes 'to ensure that such separation does not exacerbate the medical condition or mental or physical disability of the prisoner'.[104]

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91. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 37(d) and Rules 43-46.

92. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 37

93. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 44.

94. In Rule 43(a) and (b), the revised Standard Minimum Rules classify such practices as 'restrictions or disciplinary sanctions' amounting 'to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'; Rule 44 includes a definition of prolonged solitary confinement.

95. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 45 (2), with reference to Rule 67 of the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (resolution 45/113, annex); and Rule 22 of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) (resolution 65/229, annex).

96. The Istanbul Protocol on the use and effects of solitary confinement, adopted on 9 December 2007 at the International Psychological Trauma Symposium, Istanbul.

97. Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, 5 August 2011, A/66/268, para. 86.

98. For example, Report on the visit of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to the Republic of Paraguay, 7 June 2010, CAT/OP/PRY/1, para. 185.

99. Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, 5 August 2011, A/66/268, para. 86, para. 68.

100. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 45

101. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 45

102. Istanbul Statement on the use and effects of solitary confinement adopted on 9 December 2007 at the International Psychological Trauma Symposium, p4.

103. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 38 (2)

104. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 46.

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It is worth noting a number of procedural safeguards have been enshrined in the revised Standard Minimum Rules for disciplinary measures and procedures in general. First and foremost, there is the recognition that to the greatest extent possible, conflict prevention, mediation or any other alternative dispute resolution mechanism should be used to prevent disciplinary offences and to resolve conflicts. Moreover, sanctions should not include the prohibition of family contact, but rather be limited to restrictions for a limited time period and only as strictly required for the maintenance of security and order. A record should be kept of the imposition of disciplinary sanctions.[105]

Prisoners in isolation should be subject to particular attention by monitoring bodies. Monitors should ensure that their visits include a thorough examination of the use of isolation, segregation and solitary confinement, including its frequency and length. They should closely review the classification systems, and decisions to isolate prisoners, including whether these are based on an individual risk assessment. The use of isolation for 'protection' of vulnerable groups should be examined carefully.

Monitoring bodies should also pay particular attention to the conditions in segregation units and their impact on the mental well-being of the prisoners, examining in particular the possibility for detainees to maintain meaningful human contact. Furthermore, monitoring bodies should inquire whether segregation is applied in a discriminatory way towards certain groups or individuals. This requires interviews in private with detainees in actual or recent solitary confinement, checking the relevant registers, and interviews with staff.

6. 'Super-max' prisons

The increase of so-called 'super-max prisons' in various countries illustrates the excessive recourse to high-security facilities, even though violent prisoners who pose a high threat to staff and other detainees are generally only a small proportion of the prison population.

'Super-max prisons' are characterised by a very restrictive detention regime where detainees spend 22 to 23 hours in their cell, with only an hour's outdoor exercise, usually alone in small courtyards. Limited human contact with staff, fellow inmates or family lead to social isolation and *de facto* solitary confinement, despite its sustained consequences on the mental health of prisoners (see above in Sections 2 and 5).

High security and 'super-max' in Brazil

In 2006, Brazil built three federal high security prisons to detain prisoners considered too dangerous to be kept in the state's prison system. Detainees are locked in their individual cell for 22 hours a day, with two hours outdoor exercise. They are not allowed to receive newspapers and have no access to radio or TV. Family visits, including conjugal visits, are allowed every two weeks, and are difficult due to the remote location of these prisons. The staff, with a ratio of almost 1 guard to 1-2 detainees, are under the control of the federal police. In a report to the federal prison of Campo Grande, the Ministry of Justice considered that the quasi-absolute isolation of detainees was one of the main issues of concern, with consequences on detainees' mental health, evidenced by the general use of anti-depressants.[106]

In such a system, human dignity is infringed in various ways, from deprivation of human contact to an increased risk of torture and ill-treatment and infringements of the right to mental health, with consequences beyond the duration of such confinement.

While security considerations are used to justify such high-security regimes, experience demonstrates that isolation does not necessarily lead to a more secure environment but exacerbates misconduct and psychiatric disorders.

In the state of Mississippi, USA, litigation filed in 2002 – which ultimately was settled out of court – resulted in reform within the Mississippi Department of Corrections, including the reduction of the segregated population in the Unit 32 Super-max facility from 1,000 to 150. The transfer of segregated prisoners to less restrictive regimes was based on a revision of the classification procedure,[107] which limited segregation to detainees who committed serious infractions of the prison rules, are high-level gang members, or have made prior escape attempts. This was combined with a mental health treatment programme. The changes in policy were accompanied by a sharp reduction in prison violence.[108] According to the study, monthly statistics showed an almost 70 per cent drop in serious incidents, both prisoner-on-staff and prisoner-on- prisoner.[109] While prisoners remaining in the segregation unit continued to constitute a difficult population, following the change in policy they felt a greater sense of fairness and the rate of serious incidents remained relatively low.[110]

Following this positive experience, the extensive use of solitary confinement and super-max in the US has been questioned. In June 2012, the Senate Committee on

105. Revised Standard Minimum Rules, Rules 38, 43(3) and 8(e).

106. Ministerio da Justicia, Conselho nacional de política criminal e penitenciairia, *Relatorio da visita de inspeçao ao Estado o Mato Grosso do Sul,* 8-9 March 2010.

107. 'When the classification staff employed the new criteria and reviewed all the prisoners in Unit 32, they discovered that nearly 80% of the population in administrative segregation did not meet the new criteria.' See *Beyond supermax administrative segregation – Mississippi's experience rethinking prison classification and creating alternative mental health programs,* 21 July 2009, p5.

108. *Beyond supermax administrative segregation, op.cit*, p3.

109. *Beyond supermax administrative segregation, op.cit*, p7.

110. *Beyond supermax administrative segregation, op.cit*, p11.

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the Judiciary scheduled a hearing of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights entitled 'Reassessing Solitary Confinement: The Human Rights, Fiscal and Public Safety Consequences'.[111] In February 2013, the Federal Bureau of Prisons agreed to a comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nation's federal prisons.[112] Since then, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has reportedly reduced its segregated population by nearly 25 per cent and closed two of its Special Management Units, a form of segregated housing.

The National Institute of Corrections reportedly assisted states like Colorado[113] and Mississippi to reform their solitary confinement practices, with Mississippi reducing its segregated population by more than 75 per cent, which resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in prison violence.[114]

7. The overuse of technology and surveillance

The use of technology in prisons can make a positive contribution to the safety of staff and detainees and reduce the risk of abuse. This is the case, for example for metal detector devices used to replace strip searches, video cameras installed in courtyards to reduce risks of inter-prisoner violence, or video conferencing with courts to accelerate judicial procedures.[115] The presence of cameras can also deter violence or other inappropriate behaviour by staff and other detainees.

However, the indiscriminate use of high-tech systems, on a permanent basis, in particular constant CCTV surveillance in cells,[116] can constitute a serious infringement of the right to privacy. Research in a UK prison showed that a sense of being monitored contributed to an 'atmosphere of constant suspicion, paranoia, and self-conscious reflection' leading prisoners to suppress and lose touch with their identities.[117]

Furthermore, audio-visual surveillance must not be used to infringe the confidentiality and professional secrecy of detainees' meetings with lawyers, or their right to privacy during medical examinations. Audio-visual transmissions also tend to be over-relied upon as a means to prevent self-harm and suicide.

Video surveillance, and especially video recording, should therefore be accompanied by safeguards including in relation to storage of and access to the footage.[118]

There is also a risk that an increased use of technology, including high-security architecture and mechanical security mechanisms such as automatic gate locking/unlocking systems, replace human contact between detainees and staff and lead to the dehumanisation of places of detention. For example, in 2012, the South Korean government was reported to be testing robot prison guards at a facility in Pohang. The robots are equipped with cameras, a microphone, and software to analyse signs of danger emanating from prisoners in order to alert the human guards.[119]

Monitoring bodies and NPMs should examine general policies and trends related to the use of technology in places of detention, as well as their implementation in practice, with a view to assessing their impact on the dignity of detainees.

While audio-visual surveillance, such as recording of police interrogations, can provide a key safeguard against torture and other ill-treatment, monitoring bodies should be as specific as possible when recommending such measures, in order not to indirectly undermine the right to privacy and confidential consultation with legal representatives. They should also be attentive to overreliance on technology and surveillance, which carries the risk of dehumanising a place of detention.

8. Staff-prisoner relations and inter-prisoner violence

Many countries do not invest adequately in their prison system, limiting their role to the building of walls and reducing staffing levels to what is required to prevent escape, and otherwise leaving prisoners more or less to their own devices. High levels of violence and systems of self-government, leaving control in the hands of the strongest prisoners, are the logical consequences of such neglect.

When prisons are a dangerous place, people come out more likely to offend again, potentially even brutalised. Violent institutions are also very inefficient. Fights and assaults monopolise time that staff could spend on

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111. *Reassessing solitary confinement: the human rights, fiscal and public safety consequences.* Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, 19 June 2012.

112. See the press statement by Senator Dick Durbin, Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, 4 February 2013. http://durbin.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=07260483-4972-4720-8d43-8fc82a9909ac <accessed 8 October 2013>

113. In March 2012, the Canon City Super-max prison in Colorado, USA, was closed down, whereas the Illinois Tamms Super-max prison was officially shut in January 2013.

114. Senator Dick Durbin, Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, 4 February 2013, *op.cit*.

115. On the use of video-conferencing for court hearings and the risks for the right to defence, see Opinion of the French General Inspector on places of detention (NPM) of 14 October 2011: http://www.cglpl.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Avis-JO_visioconference_20111109.pdf <accessed 8 October 2013>

116. For example, this is the case for detainees under the Special Disciplinary Regime (RDD) in federal prisons in Brazil, or in Serbia in the Special Department of Pozarevac Zabela Correctional Institution, CPT Report to the Government of Serbia, visit from 1-11 February 2011, CPT/Inf (2012) 17, para.96.

117. Alison Liebling, Helen Arnold and Christina Straub, *An exploration of staff prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 years on,* revised final report, Ministry of Justice, 2011, p30.

118. See PRI/APT factsheet on 'Video recording in police custody', in *Detention Monitoring Tool: Addressing risk factors to prevent torture and ill-treatment,* 2nd edition, 2015.

119. See 'Robot prison guards to go on duty in Pohang', *The Korea Herald*, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20111124000755 <accessed 23 September 2013>.

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rehabilitation of prisoners; staff sick leave increases when they have to deal with violence; and there are wider healthcare costs of physical injuries.

The UN Committee against Torture has raised the concern that overcrowding and understaffing are conducive to inter-prisoner violence, including sexual violence, in detention facilities, especially during the night.[120] As well as improving conditions and staff numbers, the Committee recommended action to address the lack of purposeful activities, the availability of drugs, and feuding gangs.

Particular groups, such as LGBTI detainees or detainees with psycho-social disabilities are frequently at a higher risk of inter-prisoner violence, and require adequate protection. Where incidents occur, they need to be properly investigated and proportionate sanctions imposed on those responsible.

The key to a secure and humane prison system lies with the staff and the nature of its relationship with the prisoners.[121] Maintaining security requires investment in terms of the configuration of the prison, and in particular in an adequate staff to prisoner ratio. Professional staff who are carefully selected, properly trained and supervised will be able to deal with prisoners in a humane way while paying attention to matters of security and good order.

Early intervention by staff, challenging the harmful behaviour that leads to, or escalates, conflict is far more effective in reducing the costs of running prisons than staff reacting with force to violent incidents after they occur. Prisons can be made safer by meeting people's basic human needs; teaching more effective ways of managing conflict; confronting tactics that escalate disputes; and working with the social context to promote conflict resolution.

Revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (2015):

Rule 38(1): Prison administrations are encouraged to use, to the extent possible, conflict prevention, mediation or any other alternative dispute resolution mechanism to prevent disciplinary offences or to resolve conflicts.

Rule 76(1): Training (…) shall include, at a minimum, training on: (c) Security and safety, including the concept of dynamic security, the use of force and instruments of restraint, and the management of violent offenders, with due consideration of preventive and defusing techniques, such as negotiation and mediation.

Prisons which make use of dynamic security or direct supervision have been shown to produce better outcomes than those which continue to employ a traditional guarding and surveillance role.

However, in some countries, prison staff are still required to maintain formal and distant relations with the detainees in the name of security or in order to reduce risks of corruption. Staff may only be allowed to talk to prisoners to give instructions, while other conversations are prohibited. Prisoners may have to stand facing a wall or keep their hands behind their back in the presence of guards.

The CPT has stated that such 'practices are unnecessary from a security standpoint' and that 'the development of constructive and positive relations between prison staff and prisoners will not only reduce the risk of ill-treatment but also enhance control and security'.[122]

Although Rule 40(1) of the revised Standard Minimum Rules prohibits using prisoners in disciplinary capacity, in many countries the authority to maintain order is delegated to privileged detainees through informal or recognised self-management systems. Detainees to which prison management is partly 'outsourced' in this way can control every aspect of a detainee's life, from access to phone calls, to meetings with relatives and contact with the authorities. Not surprisingly, these prisoners often misuse this power, resulting in threats, intimidation and violence.

The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture has noted that internal self-management can lead to arbitrary use of power and violence 'to the detriment of vulnerable prisoners, or [be] used as means of coercion or extortion' if not regulated and managed properly.[123]

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has pointed out that overcrowding not only increases tensions, but results in the rule of the most powerful detainees, riots, disturbances and hunger strikes in protest against the conditions of detention.[124]

Monitoring bodies, including NPMs, should pay attention to occupancy rates in the facility, as well as the nature of the staff-prisoner ratio and relationship and how it is affected by security measures. This can include examining relevant standard operating procedures and training, as well as the day-to-day relations observed. Monitoring bodies need to attend to the problem of inter-prisoner violence, which is a threat to the safety and dignity of both prisoners and staff.

120. Committee against Torture, *Concluding observations,* Bulgaria, 14 December 2011, CAT/C/BGR/CO/4-5.

121. Andrew Coyle, *A human rights approach to prison management: handbook for prison staff,* International Centre for Prison Studies, 2002, p13.

122. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, *CPT Standards*, Extracts from the 11th General Report, CPT/Inf (2001)16, para.26.

123. Fourth annual report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), 3 February 2011, CAT/C/46/2, p15-16.

124. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human rights implications of overincarceration and overcrowding*, 10 August 2015, A/HRC/30/19, para. 14, with reference to CAT/OP/MEX/1, para. 166; CAT/C/BGR/CO/4-5, para. 23; and Council of Europe document CPT/Inf (2015) 12, para. 54.

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9. Prisoners' clothes

In many countries, prisoners are required to wear a clearly identifiable uniform on the grounds that it will reduce the risk of escape or facilitate recapture, and also to facilitate identification and management of prisoners on a day-to-day basis.

Colour-coding is used in many countries to differentiate pre-trial detainees and convicted prisoners, as well as different security categories or according to length of sentence or offence committed.

In Merced county jail, California, uniform is used as part of a detailed scheme of classification aimed at enabling officers to keep rival gang members apart, and prisoners who have dropped their gang membership have 'VP' – short for Victim Potential – printed on the back of their shirts to alert them to prison officers as vulnerable.[125] Critics of the policy have argued that such labelling further victimises such prisoners and may make them even more vulnerable to inter-prisoner violence. It has also been argued that colour coded uniforms for gangs may only serve to strengthen gang identity and polarise the population.

Death row inmates and prisoners serving life sentences are also singled out by uniform in many countries, often not justified by security considerations. In Florida, US, for example, death row inmates wear 'bright orange scrubs made of some hot, heavy, itchy fabric',[126] even though a flight risk is questionable in the high-security conditions of their accommodation. In Texas, US, death-sentenced inmates have 'DR' printed on the back of their uniforms.[127] In Ukraine, the practice of identifying life-sentenced prisoners by issuing them with bright orange uniforms with the label 'lifer' on the back was criticised by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) as 'stigmatising' and 'humiliating'.[128]

While such practices may be driven by considerations of security or other prison management needs, prison uniform should not be part of a punitive framework nor should it set out to humiliate the wearer, and for this reason most prison administrations have discarded the unnecessary practice of requiring prisoners to wear uniform with arrows or stripes.[129]

For women, particular issues arise with regard to prison clothing. For example, where women wear an all-in-one jumpsuit, they must undress down to the waist when using the toilet, leaving them exposed and in some settings in view of staff or other inmates. In France, the General Controller of Places of Deprivation of Liberty expressed concern about the practice in police stations of forcing women to remove their bras to reduce the risk of self-harm or suicide. Its report found that women could be left without their bra for 12-13 hours, even appearing before a judge without it, and were subjected to salacious remarks.[130]

While international standards are mostly silent on the issue of prisoner uniforms, the revised Standard Minimum Rules require that untried prisoners are allowed to wear their own clothing.[131] They further require that whenever a prisoner is taken outside the prison, 'he or she shall be allowed to wear his or her own clothing or other inconspicuous clothing', in order to avoid humiliation in public. Detainees should not be required to wear uniform when appearing before a court or jury in order to not compromise the presumption of innocence.

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture[132]

> The […] imposition of prisoner uniforms – regardless of their design – can hardly contribute to prisoners' self-esteem, which is an important part of their rehabilitation, and may be seen as running contrary to the normalisation principle, according to which conditions in prisons should be arranged so that they correspond, to the extent possible, to conditions outside.

Monitoring bodies can enquire whether the use of prison uniforms is based on and justifiable by security considerations, and whether it is compatible with the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

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125. One might speculate whether being identified as a potential victim may only serve to increase their vulnerability, especially where separation is not well enforced.

126. Conversation with Michael L. Radelet, Professor of Sociology, University of Colorado.

127. http://www.texasobserver.org/solitary-men/ (see image)

128. Report to the Ukrainian Government on the visit to Ukraine carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 24 November to 6 December 2002, 1 December, 2004, CPT/Inf (2004) 34; and Report to the Ukrainian Government on the visit to Ukraine carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 9 to 21 October 2005, 20 June 2007, CPT/Inf (2007) 22.

129. Professor Andrew Coyle, *A human rights approach to prison management,* 2nd edition, p42.

130. Le Contrôleur general des lieux de privation de liberté, Rapport d'activité 2009, http://www.cglpl.fr/2010/rapport-dactivite-2009/ <accessed 27 November 2015>.

131. Revised UN Standard Minimum Rules, Rule 115.

132. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, *Sweden: Visit 2009*, CPT/Inf (2009) 34, Section: 28/50, 27 November 2009.

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How can monitoring bodies address the balance between security and dignity?

There is a risk that in a prison, security concerns prevail over any other considerations and infringe the human rights and dignity of the persons deprived of their liberty. In order to address this risk, monitoring bodies need to exercise their mandate in a comprehensive way, taking into account the collectivity of security measures applied and their justification in the context of the specific prison and the individual case. They should critically appraise specific practices as well as their impact collectively, on whether they are justified, necessary and proportionate, and actually result in an increase of security and safety. In their reports and recommendations, they should be ready to challenge security measures, especially when practices are systematic and applied to all detainees disregarding individual security risks they may or may not pose.

Monitoring bodies may need to conduct a number of private interviews with detainees that are representational of all groups, including persons in situations of vulnerability. They should reach out to groups of prisoners who may have been subjected to excessive security measures, for example, prisoners in security or isolation cells or under solitary confinement.

Informal conversations and formal interviews in private with the staff, especially staff in direct contact with detainees, are essential for understanding their security concerns. Interviews with other personnel, such as health personnel and social workers, but also with families, professional associations or trade unions of prison staff are also helpful to understanding whether security measures and policies are legitimate or arbitrary. Monitoring bodies need to cross-check the information gathered through interviews with documents and registers, including registers of incidents, use of force and medical files in order to assess whether or not security measures are lawful, necessary and proportionate to reduce the risk they claim to tackle.

Monitoring bodies should enquire into possible discriminatory practices and the misinterpretation of specific needs as 'security threats'. They should be conscious that in prison systems that overemphasise security, persons in situations of vulnerability, including children, women,[133] older people, people living in poverty, members of ethnic or religious minorities, indigenous people, LGBTI people,[134] migrants, and persons with psycho-social disabilities[135] may be more affected and face higher risks of being exposed to abuse. For example, foreign nationals may be perceived as representing a high risk of flight and members of ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTI people may be seen as a threat to the dominant culture and therefore a hindrance to the smooth running of a prison.

Monitors also have to keep in mind the security of the persons deprived of liberty they speak to, and their risk of being subjected to reprisals or sanctions for having been in contact with them.[136] In this regard, monitors should respect the 'do no harm' principle and consider alternative ways of information gathering where available.

They must also be mindful of their own security. It is ultimately the responsibility of members of the monitoring team to determine whether or not to follow the advice of the authorities on matters relating to their security. When monitors decide to conduct an interview against the advice of the authorities, they should also consider the conditions in which such interaction takes place, for example out of hearing but in sight of guards. In this regard, monitoring bodies and NPMs may want to consider adopting an internal security policy in order to be prepared to respond to security concerns during their monitoring visits.

As an overemphasis on security in detention is part of a more global trend, monitoring bodies should also be mindful of the broader picture and societal trends that demand 'more security' in places of detention, and their impact on the management of prisons. They have a responsibility to counter false perceptions about insecurity, simplistic messages about detainees and demands for more repressive policies. In order to do this, they need to develop well-defined outreach and communication strategies targeting the media, policy-makers and the general public.

Finally, monitoring bodies have an important role to play in alerting decision-makers and the broader public about the immediate, as well as the more long-term consequences of some policies, in particular where 'security measures' in effect are counter- productive and result in an increase of violence and a deterioration of safety and order.

Ultimately, the goal of a more secure society will only be achieved through a criminal justice system that is fair and just, and where the dignity of all detained persons is respected.

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133. See PRI/APT, *Women in detention: a guide to gender-sensitive monitoring,* 2nd edition, 2015.

134. See PRI/APT, *LGBTI persons deprived of their liberty: a framework for preventive monitoring,* 2nd edition, 2015.

135. There is a disproportionately high rate of detainees suffering from some form of mental disorder in prisons, ranging from anxiety to suicidal thoughts. Due to scarcity of resources, staff or space, and because sometimes mental illness goes unnoticed for lack of medical attention from the outset of detention, persons suffering from severe psychosocial disabilities, such as psychosis, are often held in prisons, mixed with the general prison population.

136. Reprisals might also affect staff who have been in contact with the monitoring bodies.

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Second edition

Incorporates the 2015 revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

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PENAL REFORM INTERNATIONAL

Detention Monitoring Tool



Addressing risk factors to prevent torture and ill-treatment

About this paper

This paper is part of PRI/APT's Detention Monitoring Tool, which aims to provide analysis and practical guidance to help monitoring bodies, including National Preventive Mechanisms, to fulfil their preventive mandate as effectively as possible when visiting police facilities or prisons.

The tool seeks to support such bodies in addressing systemic risk factors that contribute to an environment where torture or other ill-treatment occur. It includes:

Thematic papers: these analyse broader themes that will benefit from a comprehensive monitoring approach, examining regulations and practices throughout the criminal justice process with a systemic lens, such as gender, sexual orientation or institutional culture.

Factsheets: these provide practical guidance on how monitoring bodies can focus on a number of systemic issues that are particularly high risk factors for torture or ill-treatment, such as body searches or the working conditions of prison staff.

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From: Smith, Julie C. (DOC) <jcsmith@DOC1.WA.GOV>
Sent: Tuesday, November 5, 2019 3:15 PM
To: Smith, Julie C. (DOC)
Attachments: security-dignity-2nd-ed-v6.pdf; ATT00001.txt

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Sent from my iPhone

Behavior and Attitudes

CHAPTER

4



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"The ancestor of every action is a thought."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays, First Series,* 1841

How much does what we *are* (on the inside) predict what we *do* (on the outside)? Philosophers, theologians, and educators speculate about the connections between attitude and action, character and conduct, private word and public deed. Underlying most teaching, counseling, and parenting is a simple assumption: Our private beliefs and feelings determine our public behavior; so if we want to change behavior, we must first change hearts and minds.

In the beginning, social psychologists agreed: To know people's attitudes is to predict their actions. Genocidal killers and suicide terrorists have extreme attitudes that can produce extreme behavior. Countries whose people detest another country's leaders are more likely to produce terrorist acts against them (Krueger & Malečková, 2009). Hateful attitudes spawn violent behavior.

But in 1964, Leon Festinger observed that *changing* people's attitudes often hardly affects their behavior. Festinger believed the attitude-behavior relation works

How well do our attitudes predict our behavior?

When does our behavior affect our attitudes?

Why does our behavior affect our attitudes?

Postscript: Changing ourselves through action

the other way around, with our behavior as the horse and our attitudes as the cart. As Robert Abelson (1972) put it, we are "very well trained and very good at finding reasons for what we do, but not very good at doing what we find reasons for." This chapter explores the interplay of attitudes and behavior.

attitude
Beliefs and feelings related to a person or an event (often rooted in one's beliefs, and exhibited in one's feelings and intended behavior).

In social psychology, **attitudes** are defined as beliefs and feelings related to a person or an event (Eagly & Chaiken, 2005). Thus, a person may have a negative attitude toward coffee, a neutral attitude toward the French, and a positive attitude toward the next-door neighbor.

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought."
—Buddha, *Dhamma-Pada*, 563 B.C.–483 B.C.

"Thought is the child of action."
—Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Gray*, 1926

Attitudes efficiently size up the world. When we have to respond quickly to something, the way we feel about it can guide how we react. For example, a person who *believes* a particular ethnic group is lazy and aggressive may *feel* dislike for such people and therefore intend to act in a discriminatory manner. You can remember these three dimensions as the ABCs of attitudes: *A*ffect (feelings), *B*ehavior tendency, and *C*ognition (thoughts) (Figure 1).

The study of attitudes is central to social psychology and was one of its first concerns. For much of the last century, researchers wondered how much our attitudes affect our actions.

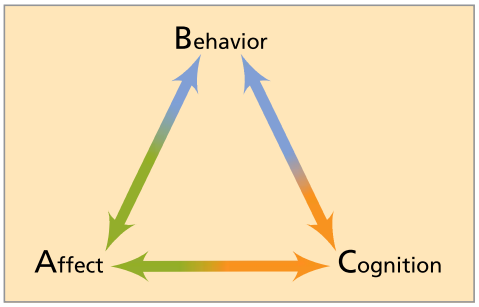
HOW WELL DO OUR ATTITUDES PREDICT OUR BEHAVIOR?

State the extent to which, and under what conditions, our inner attitudes drive our outward actions.

A blow to the supposed power of attitudes came when social psychologist Allan Wicker (1969) reviewed several dozen research studies covering a variety of people, attitudes, and behaviors. Wicker offered a shocking conclusion: People's expressed attitudes hardly predicted their varying behaviors.

- Student attitudes toward cheating bore little relation to the likelihood of their actually cheating.
- Attitudes toward the church were only modestly linked with weekly worship attendance.
- Self-described racial attitudes provided little clue to behaviors in actual situations. Many people *say* they are upset when someone makes racist remarks; yet, when they hear racism (such as someone using the N-word) respond indifferently (Kawakami et al., 2009).

The disjuncture between attitudes and actions is what Daniel Batson and his colleagues (1997, 2001, 2002; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007, 2008) call "moral hypocrisy" (appearing moral while avoiding the costs of being so). Their studies presented people with an appealing task with a possible $30 prize and a dull task with no rewards. The participants had to do one of the tasks and assign a supposed second participant to the other. Only 1 in 20 believed that assigning the appealing task with the reward to themselves was the more moral thing to do, yet 80 percent did so. In follow-up experiments, participants were given coins they could flip privately if they wanted. Even if they chose to flip, 90 percent



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FIGURE :: 1
The ABCs of Attitudes

assigned themselves to the positive task! Was that because they could specify the consequences of heads and tails after the coin toss? In another experiment, Batson put a sticker on each side of the coin, indicating what the flip outcome would signify. Still, 24 of 28 people who made the toss assigned themselves to the appealing task. When morality and greed were put on a collision course, greed usually won.

If people don't walk the same line that they talk, it's little wonder that attempts to change behavior by changing attitudes often fail. Warnings about the dangers of smoking affect only minimally those who already smoke. Sex education programs have often influenced *attitudes* toward abstinence and condom use without affecting long-term abstinence and condom use *behaviors.* Whether they are "committed greens" or environmental skeptics, Australians consume about the same energy, water, and housing space (Newton & Meyer, 2013). Well-ingrained habits and practices override attitudes. We are, it seems, a population of hypocrites.

This surprising finding that what people *say* often differs from what they *do* sent social psychologists scurrying to find out why. Surely, we reasoned, convictions and feelings sometimes make a difference.



Attitudes and behavior misaligned. After former U.S. congressman Mark Souder and staff member Tracey Jackson together recorded a pro-abstinence video, news broke that the two had been having an affair outside of their own marriages. "You'll go crazy if you don't have some sense of irony," the family values advocate told a local newspaper (Elliott, 2010).
AP Images/The Journal-Gazette/Frank Gray

Indeed. In fact, what I [DM] am about to explain now seems so obvious that I wonder why most social psychologists (myself included) were not thinking this way before the early 1970s. I must remind myself, however, that truth seldom seems obvious until it is known.

"I have opinions of my own, strong opinions, but i don't always agree with them."
—President George H. W. Bush

When Attitudes Predict Behavior

The reason—now obvious—why our behavior and our expressed attitudes differ is that both are subject to other influences—many other influences. One social psychologist counted 40 factors that complicate the relationship between attitudes and behavior (Triandis, 1982; see also Kraus, 1995). Our attitudes do predict our behavior when these *other influences on what we say and do are minimal*, when the attitude is *specific to the behavior*, and when the *attitude is potent*.

WHEN SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON WHAT WE SAY ARE MINIMAL

Unlike a doctor measuring heart rate, social psychologists never get a direct reading on attitudes. Rather, we measure *expressed* attitudes. Like other behaviors, expressions are subject to outside influences. Sometimes, for example, we say what we think others want to hear, much as legislators may vote for a popular war or tax reduction that they privately oppose.

Today's social psychologists have some clever means at their disposal for minimizing social influences on people's attitude reports. Some of these are measures of *implicit* (unconscious) attitudes—our often unacknowledged inner beliefs that may or may not correspond to our explicit (conscious) attitudes.

The most widely used attitude measure is the **implicit association test (IAT),** which uses reaction times to measure how quickly people associate concepts (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). One can, for example, measure implicit racial attitudes by assessing whether White people take longer to associate positive words with Black faces than with White faces. Implicit attitude researchers have offered various IAT assessments online (projectimplicit.net), from the serious (do you implicitly associate men with careers and women with home?) to the amusing (do you prefer Harry Potter or *Lord of the Rings?*). The 14+ million completed tests since 1998 have, they report, shown that

- *Implicit biases are pervasive.* For example, 80 percent of people show more implicit dislike for the elderly compared with the young.

implicit association test (IAT)
A computer-driven assessment of implicit attitudes. The test uses reaction times to measure people's automatic associations between attitude objects and evaluative words. Easier pairings (and faster responses) are taken to indicate stronger unconscious associations.

- *People differ in implicit bias.* Depending on their group memberships, their conscious attitudes, and the bias in their immediate environment, some people exhibit more implicit bias than others.
- *People are often unaware of their implicit biases.* Despite thinking themselves unprejudiced, even researchers themselves show implicit biases against some social groups.

Do implicit biases predict behavior? A review of the available research (now several hundred investigations) reveals that both explicit (self-report) and implicit attitudes help predict people's behaviors and judgments (Greenwald et al., 2015; Nosek et al., 2011). Thus, both together predict behavior better than either alone (Karpen et al., 2012; Spence & Townsend, 2007). The behavior predictions range from dental flossing to the fate of romantic relationships to suicide attempts (Lee et al., 2010; Millar, 2011; Nock et al., 2010). In one study, hiring managers received job applications matched on credential strength, but on one, the applicants' photos were digitally altered to make them appear obese. Several months later, when 153 of the managers completed an IAT, those with an implicit bias against the obese were less likely to invite the presumably obese applicants for interviews (Agerström & Rooth, 2011).

"There are still barriers out there, often unconscious."

—Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, Presidential Campaign Concession Speech, 2008

For attitudes formed early in life—such as racial and gender attitudes—implicit and explicit attitudes frequently diverge, with implicit attitudes often predicting behavior better. For example, implicit racial attitudes have successfully predicted interracial roommate relationships and willingness to penalize other-race people (Kubota et al., 2013; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006). For other attitudes, such as those related to consumer behavior and support for political candidates, explicit self-reports are the better predictor.

Neuroscientists have identified brain centers that produce our automatic, implicit reactions (Stanley et al., 2008). One area deep in the brain (the amygdala, a center for threat perception) is active as we automatically evaluate social stimuli. For example, White people who show strong unconscious racial bias on the IAT also exhibit high amygdala activation when viewing unfamiliar Black faces.

A word of caution: Despite excitement over these recent studies of implicit attitudes hiding in the mind's basement, the implicit association test has detractors (Blanton et al., 2006, 2007, 2009; Oswald et al., 2013). They note that, unlike an aptitude test, the IAT is not reliable enough to assess and compare individuals. Moreover, a score that suggests bias doesn't distinguish a positive bias for one group from a negative bias against another. The critics also wonder whether compassion or guilt rather than latent hostility might slow one's speed in associating Blacks with positive words. Regardless, the existence of distinct explicit and implicit attitudes confirms one of twenty-first-century psychology's biggest lessons: our "dual processing" capacity for both *automatic* (effortless, habitual, implicit, System 1) and *controlled* (deliberate, conscious, explicit, System 2) thinking.

WHEN OTHER INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOR ARE MINIMAL

On any occasion, it's not only our inner attitudes that guide us but also the situation we face. As we will see again and again, social influences can be enormous—enormous enough to induce people to violate their deepest convictions. So, would *averaging* across many situations enable us to detect more clearly the impact of our attitudes? Predicting people's behavior is like predicting a baseball or cricket player's hitting. The outcome of any particular turn at bat is nearly impossible to predict. But when we aggregate many times at bat, we can compare their approximate batting *averages.*

"Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

—Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself,* 1855

To use a research example, people's general attitude toward religion poorly predicts whether they will go to worship services during the coming week (because attendance is also influenced by the weather, the worship leader, how one is feeling, and so forth). But religious attitudes predict the total quantity of religious behaviors over time across many situations (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Kahle & Berman, 1979). The findings define a *principle of aggregation:* The effects of an attitude become more apparent when we look at a person's aggregate or average behavior.

WHEN ATTITUDES ARE SPECIFIC TO THE BEHAVIOR

Other conditions further improve the predictive accuracy of attitudes. As Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein (1977, 2005) pointed out, when the measured attitude is a general

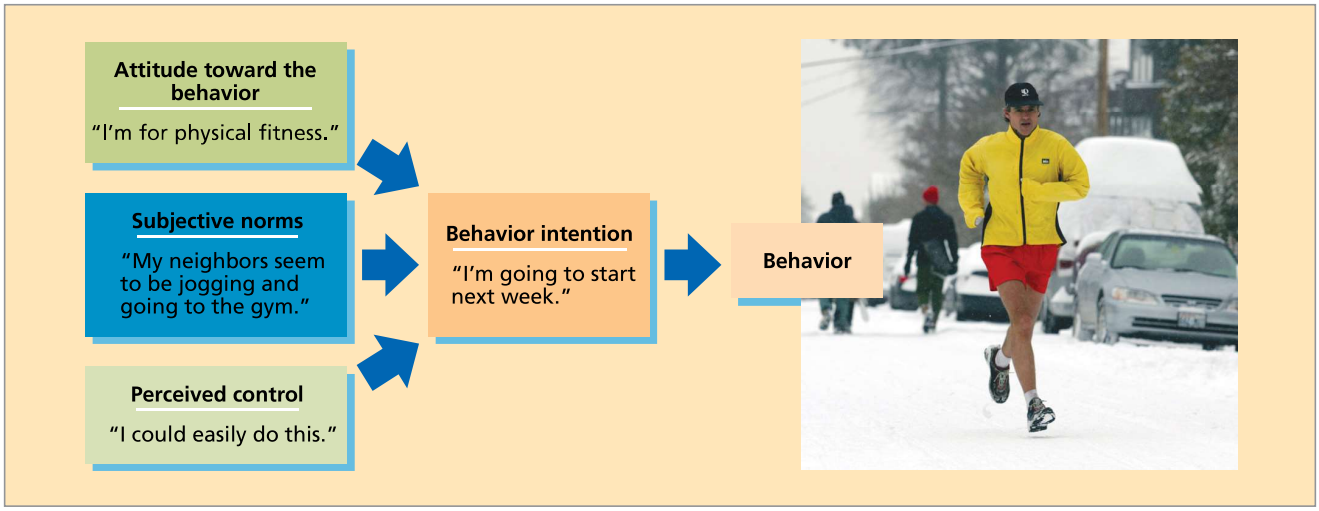


FIGURE :: 2

The Theory of Planned Behavior

Icek Ajzen, working with Martin Fishbein, has shown that one's (a) attitudes, (b) perceived social norms, and (c) feelings of control together determine one's intentions, which guide behavior. Compared with their general attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle, people's specific attitudes regarding jogging predict their jogging behavior much better.

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one—for instance, an attitude toward Asians—and the behavior is very specific—for instance, a decision whether to help a particular Asian in a particular situation—we should not expect a close correspondence between words and actions. Indeed, report Fishbein and Ajzen, in 26 out of 27 such research studies, attitudes did not predict behavior. But attitudes did predict behavior in all 26 studies they could find in which the measured attitude was directly pertinent to the situation. Thus, attitudes toward the general concept of "health fitness" poorly predict specific exercise and dietary practices. But an individual's attitudes about the costs and benefits of *jogging* are a fairly strong predictor of whether he or she *jogs* regularly.

Better yet for predicting behavior, says Ajzen and Fishbein's "theory of planned behavior," is knowing people's *intended* behaviors and their perceived self-efficacy and control (Figure 2). Moreover, several dozen experimental tests confirm that inducing new intentions induces new behavior (Bélanger-Gravel et al., 2013; Webb & Sheeran, 2006). Even asking people about their intentions to engage in a behavior often increases its likelihood (Levav & Fitzsimons, 2006). Ask people if they intend to floss their teeth in the next two weeks, and they will become more likely to do so. Ask people if they intend to vote in an upcoming election, and most will answer yes and become more likely to do so.

Further studies—more than 700 studies with 276,000 participants—confirmed that specific, relevant attitudes do predict intended and actual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Six & Eckes, 1996; Wallace et al., 2005). For example, attitudes toward condoms strongly predict condom use (Albarracin et al., 2001). And attitudes toward recycling (but not general attitudes toward environmental issues) predict intention to recycle, which predicts actual recycling (Nigbur et al., 2010; Oskamp, 1991). A practical lesson: To change habits through persuasion, we must alter people's attitudes toward *specific* practices.

So far we have seen two conditions under which attitudes will predict behavior: (1) when we minimize other influences upon our attitude statements and on our behavior, and (2) when the attitude is specifically relevant to the observed behavior. A third condition also exists: An attitude predicts behavior better when the attitude is potent.

WHEN ATTITUDES ARE POTENT

Much of our behavior is automatic. We act out familiar scripts without reflecting on what we're doing. We respond to people we meet in the hall with an automatic "Hi." We answer

the restaurant cashier's question "How was your meal?" by saying, "Fine," even if we found it only so-so.

Such mindlessness is adaptive. It frees our minds to work on other things. For habitual behaviors—seat belt use, coffee consumption, class attendance—conscious intentions are hardly activated (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). As the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1911, p. 61) argued, "Civilization advances by extending the number of operations which we can perform without thinking about them."

BRINGING ATTITUDES TO MIND. If we were prompted to think about our attitudes before acting, would we be truer to ourselves? Mark Snyder and William Swann (1976) wanted to find out. Two weeks after 120 of their University of Minnesota students indicated their attitudes toward affirmative-action employment policies, Snyder and Swann invited them to act as jurors in a sex-discrimination court case. The participants' attitudes predicted verdicts only for those who were first induced to remember their attitudes—by giving them "a few minutes to organize your thoughts and views on the affirmative-action issue." Our attitudes become potent *if* we think about them.

"Thinking is easy, acting difficult, and to put one's thoughts into action, the most difficult thing in the world."

—German Poet Goethe, 1749–1832

That suggests another way to induce people to focus on their inner convictions: *Make them self-aware,* perhaps by having them act in front of a mirror (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Maybe you, too, can recall suddenly being acutely aware of yourself upon entering a room with a large mirror. Making people self-aware in this way promotes consistency between words and deeds (Froming et al., 1982; Gibbons, 1978).

Edward Diener and Mark Wallbom (1976) noted that nearly all college students say that cheating is morally wrong. But will they follow the advice of Shakespeare's Polonius, "To thine own self be true"? Diener and Wallbom had University of Washington students work on an anagram-solving task (which, they were told, had predicted IQ) and told them to stop when a bell in the room sounded. Left alone, 71 percent cheated by working past the bell. Among students made self-aware—by working in front of a mirror while hearing their own tape-recorded voices—only 7 percent cheated. It makes one wonder: Would eye-level mirrors in stores make people more self-conscious of their attitudes about shoplifting?

"Without doubt it is a delightful harmony when doing and saying go together."

—Montaigne, *Essays,* 1588

Remember Batson's studies of moral hypocrisy? In a later experiment, Batson and his colleagues (2002) found that mirrors did bring behavior into line with espoused moral attitudes. When people flipped a coin while facing a mirror, the coin flip became scrupulously fair. Exactly half of the self-conscious participants assigned the other person to the appealing task.

"It is easier to preach virtue than to practice it."

—La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims,* 1665

FORGING STRONG ATTITUDES THROUGH EXPERIENCE. The attitudes that best predict behavior are accessible (easily brought to mind) as well as stable (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). And when attitudes are forged by experience, not just by hearsay, they are more accessible, more enduring, and more likely to guide actions. In one study, university students all expressed negative attitudes about their school's response to a housing shortage. But given opportunities to act—to sign a petition, solicit signatures, join a committee, or write a letter—only those whose attitudes grew from direct experience acted (Regan & Fazio, 1977).

SUMMING UP: How Well Do Our Attitudes Predict Our Behavior?

- How do our inner *attitudes* (evaluative reactions toward some object or person, often rooted in beliefs) relate to our external behavior? Although popular wisdom stresses the impact of attitudes on behavior, in fact, attitudes are often poor predictors of behaviors. Moreover, changing people's attitudes typically fails to produce much change in their behavior. These findings inspired social psychologists to find out why we so often fail to play the game we talk.
- The answer: Our expressions of attitudes and our behaviors are each subject to many influences. Our attitudes will predict our behavior (1) if these "other influences" are minimized, (2) if the attitude corresponds very closely to the predicted behavior (as in voting studies), and (3) if the attitude is potent (because something reminds us of it, or because we acquired it by direct experience). Under these conditions, what we think and feel predicts what we do.

WHEN DOES OUR BEHAVIOR AFFECT OUR ATTITUDES?

Summarize evidence that we can act ourselves into a way of thinking.

So, to some extent, our attitudes matter. We can think ourselves into a way of acting. Now we turn to a more startling idea: that *behavior determines attitudes.* It's true that we sometimes stand up for what we believe. But it's also true that we come to believe in what we stand up for. Social-psychological theories inspired much of the research that underlies that conclusion. Instead of beginning with these theories, however, let's first see what there is to explain. As we engage evidence that behavior affects attitudes, speculate *why* this is and then compare your ideas with social psychologists' explanations.

Consider the following incidents:

- Sarah is hypnotized and told to take off her shoes when a book drops on the floor. Fifteen minutes later a book drops, and Sarah quietly slips out of her loafers. "Sarah," asks the hypnotist, "why did you take off your shoes?" "Well . . . my feet are hot and tired," Sarah replies. "It has been a long day." The act produces the idea.
- George has electrodes temporarily implanted in the brain region that controls his head movements. When neurosurgeon José Delgado (1973) stimulates the electrodes by remote control, George always turns his head. Unaware of the remote stimulation, he offers a reasonable explanation for his head turning: "I'm looking for my slipper." "I heard a noise." "I'm restless." "I was looking under the bed."
- Carol's severe seizures were relieved by surgically separating her two brain hemispheres. Now, in an experiment, psychologist Michael Gazzaniga (1985) flashes a picture of a nude woman to the left half of Carol's field of vision, which projects to her nonverbal right brain hemisphere. A sheepish smile spreads over her face, and she begins chuckling. Asked why, she invents—and apparently believes—a plausible explanation: "Oh—that funny machine." Frank, another split-brain patient, has the word "smile" flashed to his nonverbal right hemisphere. He obliges and forces a smile. Asked why, he explains, "This experiment is very funny."

The mental aftereffects of our behavior also appear in many social-psychological examples of self-persuasion. As we will see over and over, attitudes follow behavior.

Role Playing

The word **role** is borrowed from the theater and, as in the theater, refers to actions expected of those who occupy a particular social position. When enacting new social roles, we may at first feel phony. But our unease seldom lasts.

role
A set of norms that defines how people in a given social position ought to behave.

Think of a time when you stepped into some new role—perhaps your first days on a job or at college. That first week on campus, for example, you may have been supersensitive to your new social situation and tried valiantly to act mature and to suppress your high school behavior. At such times you may have felt self-conscious. You observed your new speech and actions because they weren't natural to you. Then something amazing happened: Your pseudo-intellectual talk no longer felt forced. The role began to fit as comfortably as your old jeans and T-shirt.

In one famous and controversial study, college men volunteered to spend time in a simulated prison constructed in Stanford's psychology department by Philip Zimbardo (1971; Haney & Zimbardo, 1998, 2009). Zimbardo wanted to find out: Is prison brutality a product of evil prisoners and malicious guards? Or do the institutional roles of guard and prisoner embitter and harden even compassionate people? Do the people make the place violent? Or does the place make the people violent?

"No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which may be true."
—Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1850

By a flip of a coin, Zimbardo designated some students as guards. He gave them uniforms, billy clubs, and whistles and instructed them to enforce the rules. The other half,



Guards and prisoners in the Stanford prison simulation quickly absorbed the roles they played.
©Phillip Zimbardo

the prisoners, were locked in cells and made to wear humiliating hospital-gown-like outfits. After a jovial first day of "playing" their roles, the guards and the prisoners, and even the experimenters, got caught up in the situation. The guards began to disparage the prisoners, and some devised cruel and degrading routines. The prisoners broke down, rebelled, or became apathetic. There developed, reported Zimbardo (1972), a "growing confusion between reality and illusion, between role-playing and self-identity. . . . This prison which we had created . . . was absorbing us as creatures of its own reality." Observing the emerging social pathology, Zimbardo ended the planned two-week simulation after only six days.

Critics have questioned the spontaneity and reliability of Zimbardo's observations (Griggs, 2014). Moreover, the point is not that we are powerless to resist imposed roles. In Zimbardo's prison simulation, in Abu Ghraib Prison (where guards degraded Iraq war prisoners), and in other atrocity-producing situations, some people become sadistic and others do not (Haslam & Reicher, 2007, 2012; Mastroianni & Reed, 2006; Zimbardo, 2007). Salt dissolves in water and sand does not. So also, notes John Johnson (2007), when placed in a rotten barrel, some people become bad apples and others do not. Behavior is a product of both the individual person and the situation, and the prison study appears to have attracted volunteers who were prone to aggressiveness (McFarland & Carnahan, 2009).

The deeper lesson of the role-playing studies is not that we are powerless machines. Rather, it concerns how what is unreal (an artificial role) can subtly morph into what is real. In a new career—as teacher, soldier, or businessperson, for example—we enact a role that shapes our attitudes. In one study, military training toughened German males' personalities. Compared to a control group, they were less agreeable, even 5 years after leaving the military (Jackson et al., 2012). And in one national study of U.S. adolescents, sustained role playing of "risk-glorifying" video games was followed by increased risky and deviant real-life behaviors (Hull et al., 2014). The moral: When we act like those around us, we slightly change our former selves into being more like them.

Imagine playing the role of slave—not just for six days but for decades. If a few days altered the behavior of those in Zimbardo's "prison," imagine the corrosive effects of decades of subservient behavior. The master may be even more profoundly affected,

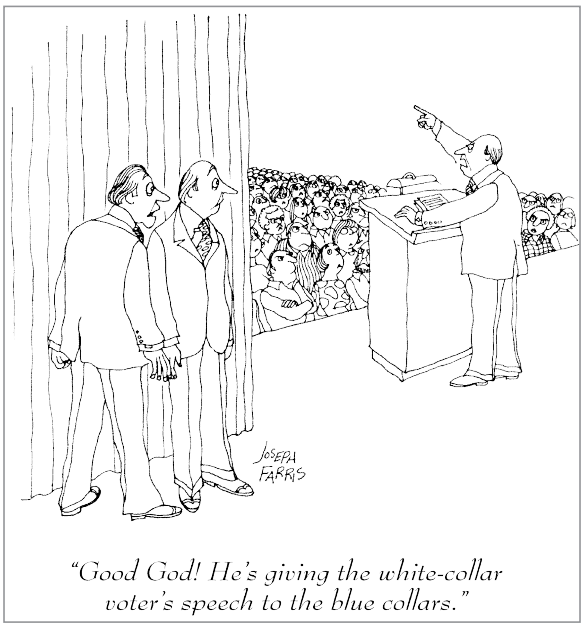


After the degradation of Iraqi prisoners, Philip Zimbardo (2004a, 2004b) noted "direct and sad parallels between similar behavior of the 'guards' in the Stanford Prison Experiment." Such behavior, he contends, is attributable to a toxic situation that can make good people into perpetrators of evil. "It's not that we put bad apples in a good barrel. We put good apples in a bad barrel. The barrel corrupts anything that it touches."
Courtesy of Washington Post/Getty Images News/Getty Images

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because the master's role is chosen. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, recalls his new owner's transformation as she absorbed her role:

> My new mistress proved to be all she appeared when I first met her at the door—a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings. . . . I was utterly astonished at her goodness. I scarcely knew how to behave towards her. She was entirely unlike any other white woman I had ever seen. . . . The meanest slave was put fully at ease in her presence, and none left without feeling better for having seen her. Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music. But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon. (Douglass, 1845, pp. 57–58)



"Good God! He's giving the white-collar voter's speech to the blue collars."

Saying becomes believing: In expressing our thoughts to others, we sometimes tailor our words to what we think the others will want to hear, and then come to believe our own words.
© Joseph Farris/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

Saying Becomes Believing

People often adapt what they say to please their listeners. They are quicker to tell people good news than bad, and they adjust their message toward their listener's views (Manis et al., 1974; Tesser et al., 1972; Tetlock, 1983). When induced to give spoken or written support to something they doubt, people will often feel bad about their deceit. Nevertheless, they begin to believe what they are saying (*assuming* they weren't bribed or coerced into doing so). When there is no compelling external explanation for one's words, saying becomes believing (Klaas, 1978).

Tory Higgins and his colleagues (Higgins & McCann, 1984; Higgins & Rholes, 1978) illustrated how saying becomes believing. They had university students read a personality description of someone and then summarize it for someone else, who was believed either to like or to dislike that person. The students wrote a more positive description when the recipient liked the person. Having said positive things, they also then liked the person more themselves. Asked to recall what they had read, they remembered the description as more positive than it was. In short, people tend to adjust their messages to their listeners, and, having done so, to believe the altered message.

Evil and Moral Acts

The attitudes-follow-behavior principle also works with immoral acts. Evil sometimes results from gradually escalating commitments. A trifling evil act erodes one's moral sensitivity, making it easier to perform a worse act. To paraphrase La Rochefoucauld's 1665 book of *Maxims,* it is not as difficult to find a person who has never succumbed to a given temptation as to find a person who has succumbed only once. After telling a "white lie" and thinking, "Well, that wasn't so bad," the person may go on to tell a bigger lie.

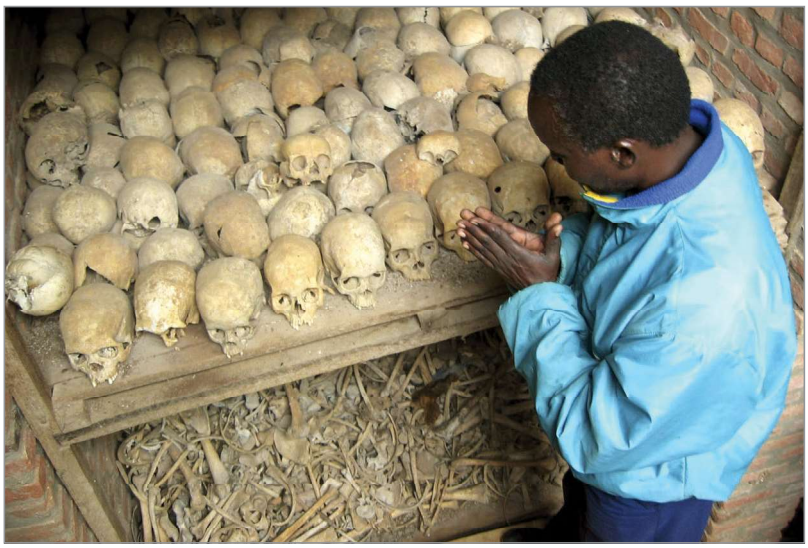
"Our self-definitions are not constructed in our heads; they are forged by our deeds."

—Robert McAfee Brown, *Creative Dislocation: The Movement of Grace,* 1980

Harmful acts change us in other ways, too. We tend not only to hurt those we dislike but also to dislike those we hurt. Harming an innocent victim—by uttering hurtful comments or delivering electric shocks—typically leads aggressors to disparage their victims, thus helping them justify their cruel behavior (Berscheid et al., 1968; Davis & Jones, 1960; Glass, 1964). This is especially so when we are coaxed rather than coerced, and thus feel responsible for our act.

The attitudes-follow-behavior phenomenon appears in wartime. Prisoner-of-war camp guards would sometimes display good manners to captives in their first days on the job. Soldiers ordered to kill may initially react with revulsion to the point of sickness over their act. But not for long (Waller, 2002). Eventually, they will denigrate their enemies with nicknames. People tend to humanize their pets and dehumanize their enemies.

Attitudes also follow behavior in peacetime. A group that holds another in slavery will likely come to perceive the slaves as having traits that justify their oppression. Prison staff who participate in executions experience "moral disengagement" by coming to believe (more strongly than other prison staff) that their victims deserve their fate (Osofsky et al., 2005).



Cruel acts, such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide, tend to breed even crueler and more hate-filled attitudes. "At first, killing was obligatory," explained one participant in the Rwandan genocide. "Afterward, we got used to it. We became naturally cruel. We no longer needed encouragement or fines to kill, or even orders or advice" (quoted by Hatzfeld, 2005, p. 71).
AP Images/Sayyid Azim

Actions and attitudes feed each other, sometimes to the point of moral numbness. The more one harms another and adjusts one's attitudes, the easier it becomes to do harm. Conscience is corroded.

To simulate the "killing begets killing" process, Andy Martens and his collaborators (2007, 2010, 2012) asked University of Arizona students to kill some bugs. They wondered: Would killing a few bugs in a "practice" trial increase students' willingness to kill more bugs later? To find out, they asked some students to look at one small bug in a container, then to dump it into the coffee grinding machine shown in Figure 3, and then to press the "on" button for 3 seconds. (No bugs were actually killed. An unseen stopper at the base of the insert tube prevented the bug from actually entering the killing machine, which tore bits of paper to simulate the sound of a killing.) Those who believed they killed five bugs went on to "kill" significantly more bugs during an ensuing 20-second period.

Harmful acts shape the self, but so, thankfully, do moral acts. Our character is reflected in what we do when we think no one is looking. Researchers have tested character by giving children temptations when it seems no one is watching. Consider what happens when children resist the temptation. In a dramatic experiment, Jonathan Freedman (1965) introduced elementary school children to an enticing battery-controlled robot, instructing them not to play with it while he was out of the room. Freedman used a severe threat with half the children and a mild threat with the others. Both were sufficient to deter the children.

Several weeks later a different researcher, with no apparent relation to the earlier events, left each child to play in the same room with the same toys. Three-fourths of those who had heard the severe threat now freely played with the robot; of those given the mild deterrent, only a third played with it. Apparently, the mild deterrent was strong enough to elicit the desired behavior yet mild enough to leave them with a sense of choice. Having earlier chosen consciously *not* to play with the toy, the mildly deterred children internalized their decisions. Moral action, especially when chosen rather than coerced, affects moral thinking.

FIGURE :: 3

Killing Begets Killing

Students who believed they killed several bugs by dropping them in this apparent killing machine, later killed more bugs during a self-paced killing period. (In reality, no bugs were harmed.)
Courtesy of Andy Martens, University of Canterbury



Moreover, positive behavior fosters liking for the person. Doing a favor for an experimenter or another participant, or tutoring a student, usually increases liking of the person helped (Blanchard & Cook, 1976). People who pray for a romantic partner (even in controlled experiments) thereafter exhibit greater commitment and fidelity to the partner (Fincham et al., 2010). It is a lesson worth remembering: If you wish to love someone more, act as if you do.

In 1793 Benjamin Franklin explored the idea that doing a favor engenders liking. As clerk of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, he was disturbed by opposition from another important legislator. So Franklin set out to win him over:

I did not . . . aim at gaining his favour by paying any servile respect to him but, after some time, took this other method. Having heard that he had in his library a certain very scarce and curious book I wrote a note to him expressing my desire of perusing that book and requesting he would do me the favour of lending it to me for a few days. He sent it immediately and I return'd it in about a week, expressing strongly my sense of the favour. When we next met in the House he spoke to me (which he had never done before), and with great civility; and he ever after manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions, so that we became great friends and our friendship continued to his death. (quoted by Rosenzweig, 1972, p. 769)

"We do not love people so much for the good they have done us, as for the good we have done them."

—Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 1867–1869

INTERRACIAL INTERACTION AND RACIAL ATTITUDES

If moral action feeds moral attitudes, will positive interactions between people of different races reduce racial prejudice—much as mandatory seat belt use has produced more favorable seat belt attitudes? That was part of social scientists' testimony before the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision to desegregate schools. Their argument ran like this: If we wait for the heart to change—through preaching and teaching—we will wait a long time for racial justice. But if we legislate moral action, we can, under the right conditions, indirectly affect heartfelt attitudes.

That idea runs counter to the presumption that "you can't legislate morality." Yet attitude change has, as social psychologists predicted, followed desegregation. Consider:

"We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage."

—Aristotle

- Following the Supreme Court decision, the percentage of White Americans favoring integrated schools jumped and now includes nearly everyone.
- In the 10 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the percentage of White Americans who described their neighborhoods, friends, co-workers, or other students as all-White declined by about 20 percent for each of those measures. Interracial interaction was increasing. During the same period, the percentage of White Americans who said that Blacks should be allowed to live in any neighborhood increased from 65 percent to 87 percent (*ISR Newsletter,* 1975). Attitudes were changing, too.
- More uniform national standards against discrimination were followed by decreasing differences in racial attitudes among people of differing religions, classes, and geographic regions (Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971; Taylor et al., 1978). As Americans came to act more alike, they came to think more alike.

Social Movements

We have seen that a society's laws and, therefore, its behavior can have a strong influence on its racial attitudes. A danger lies in the possibility of employing the same idea for political socialization on a mass scale. For many Germans during the 1930s, participation in Nazi rallies, displaying the Nazi flag, and especially the public greeting "Heil Hitler" established a profound inconsistency between behavior and belief. Historian Richard Grunberger (1971) reports that for those who had their doubts about Hitler, "the 'German greeting' was a powerful conditioning device. Having once decided to intone it as an outward token of conformity, many experienced . . . discomfort at the contradiction between their words and their feelings. Prevented from saying what they believed, they tried to establish their psychic equilibrium by consciously making themselves believe what they said" (p. 27).

The practice is not limited to totalitarian regimes. Political rituals—the daily flag salute by schoolchildren, singing the national anthem—use public conformity to build private patriotism. I [DM] recall participating in air-raid drills in my elementary school not far from the Boeing Company in Seattle. After we acted repeatedly as if we were the targets of Russian attack, we came to fear the Russians.



Our political rituals—the daily flag salute by schoolchildren, singing the national anthem—use public conformity to build private allegiance.
AP Images/Gary Kazanjian

Many people assume that the most potent social indoctrination comes through *brainwashing,* a term coined to describe what happened to American prisoners of war (POWs) during the 1950s Korean War. Although the "thought-control" program was not as irresistible as "brainwashing" suggests, the results still were disconcerting. Hundreds of prisoners cooperated with their captors. Twenty-one chose to remain after being granted permission to return to America. And many of those who did return came home believing that "although communism won't work in America, I think it's a good thing for Asia" (Segal, 1954).

Edgar Schein (1956) interviewed many of the POWs and reported that the captors' methods included a gradual escalation of demands. The captors always started with trivial requests and gradually worked up to more significant ones. "Thus after a prisoner had once been 'trained' to speak or write out trivia, statements on more important issues were demanded." Moreover, they always expected active participation, be it just copying something or participating in group discussions, writing self-criticism, or uttering public confessions. Once a prisoner had spoken or written a statement, he felt an inner need to make his beliefs consistent with his acts. That often drove prisoners to persuade themselves of what they had done wrong. The "start small and build" tactic was an effective application of what the "Persuasion" chapter calls "the foot-in-the-door technique," and it continues to be so today in the socialization of terrorists and torturers.

"You can use small commitments to manipulate a person's self-image; you can use them to turn citizens into 'public servants,' prospects into 'customers,' prisoners into 'collaborators.'"

—Robert Cialdini, *Influence,* 1988

Now let us ask you, before reading further, to play theorist. Ask yourself: Why in these studies and real-life examples did attitudes follow behavior? Why might playing a role or making a speech influence your attitude?

SUMMING UP: When Does Our Behavior Affect Our Attitudes?

- The attitude-action relation also works in the reverse direction: We are likely not only to think ourselves into action but also to act ourselves into a way of thinking. When we act, we amplify the idea underlying what we have done, especially when we feel responsible for it. Many streams of evidence converge on this principle.
- Similarly, what we say or write can strongly influence attitudes that we subsequently hold.
- Research on the *foot-in-the-door phenomenon* reveals that committing a small act makes people more willing to do a larger one later.
- Actions also affect our moral attitudes: That which we have done, even if it is evil, we tend to justify as right.
- Similarly, our racial and political behaviors help shape our social consciousness: We not only stand up for what we believe, we also believe in what we have stood up for.
- Political and social movements may legislate behavior designed to lead to attitude change on a mass scale.

WHY DOES OUR BEHAVIOR AFFECT OUR ATTITUDES?

State the theories that seek to explain the attitudes-follow-behavior phenomenon. Discuss how the contest between these competing theories illustrates the process of scientific explanation.

We have seen that several streams of evidence merge to form a river: our actions influence our attitudes. Do these observations offer clues to *why* action affects attitude? Social psychology's detectives suspect three possible sources:

- *Self-presentation theory* assumes that for strategic reasons we express attitudes that make us appear consistent.
- *Cognitive dissonance theory* assumes that to reduce discomfort, we justify our actions to ourselves.
- *Self-perception theory* assumes that our actions are self-revealing: when uncertain about our feelings or beliefs, we look to our behavior, much as anyone else would.



"I see he finally got rid of that idiotic comb-over."

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Self-Presentation: Impression Management

The first explanation began as a simple idea. Who among us does not care what people think? People spend billions on clothes, diets, cosmetics, and plastic surgery—all because of their fretting over what others think. We see making a good impression as a way to gain social and material rewards, to feel better about ourselves, even to become more secure in our social identities (Leary, 1994, 2010, 2012).

No one wants to look foolishly inconsistent. To avoid seeming so, we express attitudes that match our actions. To appear consistent, we may automatically pretend those attitudes (Tyler, 2012). Even a little insincerity or hypocrisy can pay off in managing the impression we are making—or so self-presentation theory suggests.

Does our feigning consistency explain why expressed attitudes shift toward consistency with behavior? To some extent, yes—people exhibit a much smaller attitude change when a fake lie detector discourages them from trying to make a good impression (Paulhus, 1982; Tedeschi et al., 1987).

But there is more to attitudes than self-presentation, for people express their changed attitudes even to someone who has no knowledge of their earlier behavior. Two other theories explain why people sometimes internalize their self-presentations as genuine attitude changes.

Self-Justification: Cognitive Dissonance

One theory is that our attitudes change because we are motivated to maintain consistency among our cognitions. That is the implication of Leon Festinger's (1957) famous **cognitive dissonance** theory. The theory is simple, but its range of application is enormous, making "cognitive dissonance" part of the vocabulary of today's educated people. It assumes that we feel tension, or "dissonance", when two of our thoughts or beliefs ("cognitions") are inconsistent. Festinger argued that to reduce this unpleasant arousal, we often adjust our thinking. This simple idea, and some surprising predictions derived from it, have spawned more than 2,000 studies (Cooper, 1999).

cognitive dissonance
Tension that arises when one is simultaneously aware of two inconsistent cognitions. For example, dissonance may occur when we realize that we have, with little justification, acted contrary to our attitudes or made a decision favoring one alternative despite reasons favoring another.

One inspiration for the theory was a participant-observation study by Festinger and his colleagues (1956)—a study that a recent Association for Psychological Science president declared as his all-time favorite psychological study (Medin, 2011). Festinger and his colleagues read a news report of a UFO cult's expecting to be rescued by flying saucers from a cataclysmic flood anticipated on December 21, 1954. The researchers' response? They joined the group, and observed.

As December 21 approached, the most devoted followers quit their jobs and disposed of their possessions, with some even leaving their spouses. So what happened "when prophesy fails"? When December 21st passed uneventfully, the group coped with its massive dissonance not by abandoning their beliefs, but with increased fervor. Their faithfulness had, they decided,

persuaded God to spare the world—a message they now proclaimed boldly. In modern experiments, too, people whose confident beliefs are shaken will often respond by seeking to persuade others. "When in doubt, shout!" concluded the researchers (Gal & Rucker, 2010).

selective exposure
The tendency to seek information and media that agree with one's views and to avoid dissonant information.

Another way people minimize dissonance, Festinger believed, is through **selective exposure** to agreeable information. Studies have asked people about their views on various topics, and then invited them to choose whether they wanted to view information supporting or opposing their viewpoint. Twice as many preferred supporting rather than challenging information (Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2010; Hart et al., 2009; Sweeny et al., 2010). We prefer news that affirms us over news that informs us.

People are especially keen on reading information that supports their political, religious, and ethical views—a phenomenon that most of us can illustrate from our own favorite news and blog sources. Moreover, people who have strong views on some topic—for instance, gun control, climate change, or economic policy—are prone to "identity-protective cognition" (Kahan et al., 2011, 2014). To minimize dissonance, their beliefs steer their reasoning and their evaluation of data. Shown the same data about human-caused climate change, people will read it differently depending on their preexisting views. On more practical and less values-relevant topics, "accuracy motives" drive us. Thus, we welcome a home inspection before buying or a second opinion before surgery.

Dissonance theory pertains mostly to discrepancies between behavior and attitudes. We are aware of both. Thus, if we sense an inconsistency, perhaps some hypocrisy, we feel pressure for change. That helps explain why British and U.S. cigarette smokers have been much more likely than nonsmokers to doubt that smoking is dangerous (Eiser et al., 1979; Saad, 2002).

After the 2003 Iraq War, noted the director of the Program of International Policy Attitudes, some Americans struggled to reduce their "experience of cognitive dissonance" (Kull, 2003). The war's main premise had been that Saddam Hussein, unlike most other brutal dictators, had weapons of mass destruction. As the war began, only 38 percent of Americans said the war was justified even if Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction (Gallup, 2003). Nearly four in five Americans believed their invading troops would find such, and a similar percentage supported the just-launched war (Duffy, 2003; Newport et al., 2003).

When no such weapons were found, the war-supporting majority experienced dissonance, which was heightened by their awareness of the war's financial and human costs, by scenes of Iraq in chaos, by surging anti-American attitudes in Europe and in Muslim countries, and by inflamed pro-terrorist attitudes. To reduce their dissonance, noted the Program of International Policy Attitudes, some Americans revised their memories of their government's main rationale for going to war. The reasons now became liberating an oppressed people from tyrannical and genocidal rule and laying the groundwork for a more peaceful and democratic Middle East. Three months after the war began, the once-minority opinion became, for a time, the majority view: 58 percent of Americans now supported the war even if there were none of the proclaimed weapons of mass destruction (Gallup, 2003). "Whether or not they find weapons of mass destruction doesn't matter," suggested Republican pollster Frank Luntz (2003), "because the rationale for the war changed."

In *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts,* social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson (2007, p. 7) illustrate dissonance reduction by leaders of various political parties when faced with clear evidence that a decision they made or a course of action they chose turned out to be wrong, even disastrous. This human phenomenon is nonpartisan, note Tavris and Aronson: "A president who has justified his actions to himself, believing that he has *the truth,* becomes impervious to self-correction." For example, Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's biographer described him as someone who held to his beliefs, even when sinking in the quagmire of Vietnam, regardless "of the facts in the matter." And Republican president George W. Bush, in the years after launching the Iraq war, said that "knowing what I know today, I'd make the decision again" (2005), that "I've never been more convinced that the decisions I made are the right decisions" (2006), and that "this war has . . . come at a high cost in lives and treasure, but those costs are necessary" (2008).

Cognitive dissonance theory offers an explanation for such self-persuasion, and it also offers several surprising predictions. See if you can anticipate them.

INSUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION

Imagine you are a participant in a famous experiment staged by the creative Festinger and his student J. Merrill Carlsmith (1959). For an hour, you are required to perform dull tasks, such as turning wooden knobs again and again. After you finish, the experimenter (Carlsmith) explains that the study concerns how expectations affect performance. The next participant, waiting outside, must be led to expect an *interesting* experiment. The seemingly upset experimenter, whom Festinger had spent hours coaching until he became extremely convincing, explains that the assistant who usually creates this expectation couldn't make this session. Wringing his hands, he pleads, "Could you fill in and do this?"

It's for science and you are being paid, so you agree to tell the next participant (who is actually the experimenter's accomplice) what a delightful experience you have just had. "Really?" responds the supposed participant. "A friend of mine was in this experiment a week ago, and she said it was boring." "Oh, no," you respond, "it's really very interesting. You get good exercise while turning some knobs. I'm sure you'll enjoy it." Finally, someone else who is studying how people react to experiments has you complete a questionnaire that asks how much you actually enjoyed your knob-turning experience.

Now for the prediction: Under which condition are you most likely to believe your little lie and say that the dull experiment was indeed interesting? When paid $1 for fibbing, as some of the participants were? Or when paid a then-lavish $20, as others were? Contrary to the common notion that big rewards produce big effects, Festinger and Carlsmith made an outrageous prediction: Those paid just $1 (hardly sufficient justification for a lie) would be most likely to adjust their attitudes to their actions. Having **insufficient justification** for their actions, they would experience more discomfort (dissonance) and thus be more motivated to believe in what they had done. Those paid $20 had sufficient justification for what they had done and hence should have experienced less dissonance. As Figure 4 shows, the results confirmed this intriguing prediction.*

insufficient justification
Reduction of dissonance by internally justifying one's behavior when external justification is "insufficient."

In dozens of later experiments, this attitudes-follow-behavior effect was strongest when people felt some choice and when their actions had foreseeable consequences. One experiment had people read disparaging lawyer jokes into a recorder (for example, "How can you tell when a lawyer is lying? His lips are moving."). The reading produced more negative attitudes toward

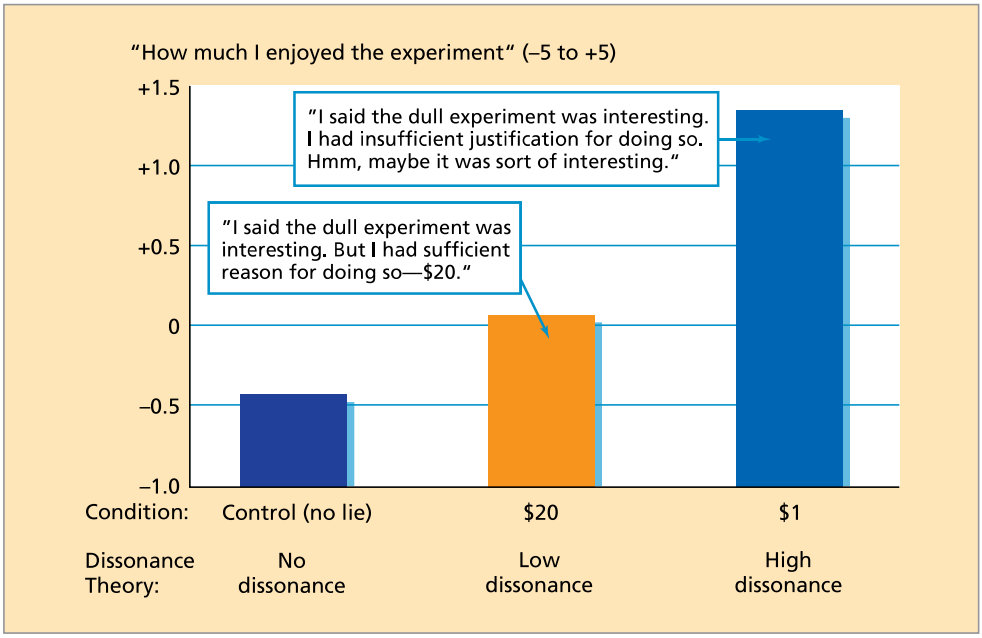


FIGURE :: 4
Insufficient Justification
Dissonance theory predicts that when our actions are not fully explained by external rewards or coercion, we will experience dissonance, which we can reduce by believing in what we have done.
Source: Data from Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959.

*There is a seldom-reported final aspect of this 1950s experiment. Imagine yourself finally back with the experimenter, who is truthfully explaining the whole study. Not only do you learn that you've been duped, but also the experimenter asks for the $20 back. Do you comply? Festinger and Carlsmith note that all their Stanford student participants willingly reached into their pockets and gave back the money. This is a foretaste of some quite amazing observations on compliance and conformity. As we will see, when the social situation makes clear demands, people usually respond accordingly.



Cognitive dissonance theory focuses on what induces a desired action. Research suggests that parents use "only enough" incentive to elicit desired behavior.
KidStock/Getty Images

lawyers when it was a chosen rather than a coerced activity (Hobden & Olson, 1994). Other experiments have engaged people to write essays for a measly $1.50 or so. When the essay argues something they don't believe in—for instance, a tuition increase—the underpaid writers begin to feel somewhat greater sympathy with the policy. Pretense becomes reality.

Earlier we noted how the insufficient justification principle works with punishments. Children were more likely to internalize a request not to play with an attractive toy if they were given a mild threat that insufficiently justified their compliance. When a parent says, "Clean up your room, Joshua, or else expect a hard spanking," Joshua won't need to internally justify cleaning his room. The severe threat is justification enough.

Note that cognitive dissonance theory focuses not on the relative effectiveness of rewards and punishments administered after the act but, rather, on what induces a desired action. It aims to have Joshua say, "I am cleaning up my room because I want a clean room," rather than, "I am cleaning up my room because my parents will spank me if I don't." The principle is this: *Attitudes follow behaviors for which we feel some responsibility.*

Authoritarian management will be effective, the theory predicts, only when the authority is present—because people are unlikely to internalize forced behavior. Bree, a formerly enslaved talking horse in C. S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy* (1974), observes, "One of the worst results of being a slave and being forced to do things is that when there is no one to force you any more you find you have almost lost the power of forcing yourself" (p. 193). Dissonance theory insists that encouragement and inducement should be enough to elicit the desired action (so that attitudes may follow the behavior). But it suggests that managers, teachers, and parents should use only enough incentive to elicit the desired behavior.

DISSONANCE AFTER DECISIONS

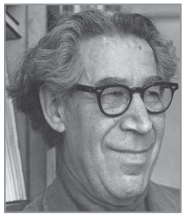
The emphasis on perceived choice and responsibility implies that decisions produce dissonance. When faced with an important decision—what college to attend, whom to date, which job to accept—we are sometimes torn between two equally attractive alternatives. Perhaps you can recall a time when, having committed yourself, you became painfully aware of dissonant cognitions—the desirable features of what you had rejected and the undesirable features of what you had chosen. If you decided to live on campus, you may have realized you were giving up the spaciousness and freedom of an apartment in favor of cramped, noisy dorm quarters. If you elected to live off campus, you may have realized that your decision meant physical separation from campus and friends, and having to cook and clean for yourself.

After making important decisions, you can reduce dissonance by upgrading the chosen alternative and downgrading the unchosen option. In the first published dissonance experiment

THE inside STORY

Leon Festinger on Dissonance Reduction

Following a 1934 earthquake in India, there were rumors outside the disaster zone of worse disasters to follow. It occurred to me that these rumors might be "anxiety-justifying"—cognitions that would justify their lingering fears. From that germ of an idea, I developed my theory of dissonance reduction—making your view of the world fit with how you feel or what you've done.



Leon Festinger (1920–1989)
AP Images/New School for Social Research



Big decisions can produce big dissonance when one later ponders the negative aspects of what is chosen and the positive aspects of what was not chosen.
Ariel Skelley/Getty Images

(1956), Jack Brehm brought some of his wedding gifts to his University of Minnesota lab and had women rate eight products, such as a toaster, a radio, and a hair dryer. Brehm then showed the women two objects they had rated similarly and told them they could have whichever they chose. Later, when rerating the eight objects, the women increased their evaluations of the item they had chosen and decreased their evaluations of the rejected item. It seems that after we have made our choices, the grass does not then grow greener on the other side of the fence. (Afterward, Brehm confessed he couldn't afford to let them keep what they chose.)

With simple decisions, this deciding-becomes-believing effect can breed overconfidence (Blanton et al., 2001): "What I've decided must be right." The effect can occur very quickly. Robert Knox and James Inkster (1968) found that racetrack bettors who had just put down their money felt more optimistic about their bets than did those who were about to bet. In the few moments that intervened between standing in line and walking away from the betting window, nothing had changed—except the decisive action and the person's feelings about it. There may sometimes be but a slight difference between two options, as we can recall in helping make faculty tenure decisions. The competence of one faculty member who barely makes it and that of another who barely loses seems not very different—until after the committee makes and announces the decision.

Our preferences influence our decisions, which then sharpen our preferences. This choices-influence-preferences effect occurs even after people press a button to choose what they think was a subliminally presented vacation alternative (nothing was actually shown them). They later tended to prefer the holiday that they believed they had chosen (Sharot et al., 2010, 2012). Moreover, once people chose a holiday destination, they preferred it up to three years later.

Decisions, once made, grow their own self-justifying legs of support. Often, these new legs are strong enough that when one leg is pulled away—perhaps the original one, as in the Iraq war case—the decision does not collapse. Rosalia decides to take a trip home if it can be done for an airfare under $500. It can, so she makes her reservation and begins to think of additional reasons why she will be glad to see her family. When she goes to buy the tickets, however, she learns there has been a fare increase to $575. No matter; she is now determined to go. It never occurs to people, reports Robert Cialdini (1984, p. 103), "that those additional reasons might never have existed had the choice not been made in the first place."

"Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before."

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity,* 1942

Self-Perception

Although dissonance theory has inspired much research, an even simpler theory also explains its phenomena. Consider how we make inferences about other people's attitudes. We see how a person acts in a particular situation, and then we attribute the behavior

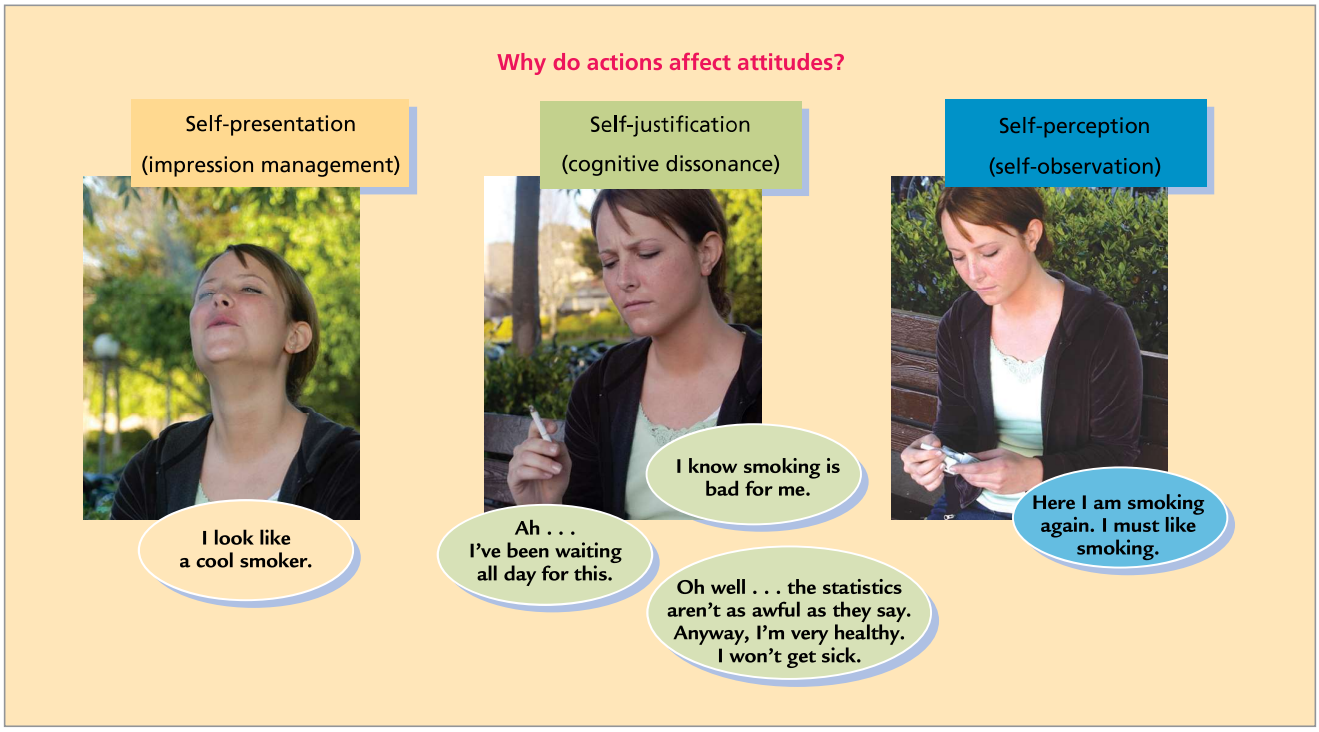


FIGURE :: 5

Three Theories Explain Why Attitudes Follow Behavior

Colin Young-Wolff/PhotoEdit

either to the person's traits and attitudes or to environmental forces. If we see parents coercing 10-year-old Brett into saying, "I'm sorry," we attribute Brett's apology to the situation, not to his personal regret. If we see Brett apologizing with no coercion, we attribute the apology to Brett himself (Figure 5).

self-perception theory
The theory that when we are unsure of our attitudes, we infer them much as would someone observing us—by looking at our behavior and the circumstances under which it occurs.

Self-perception theory (proposed by Daryl Bem, 1972) assumes that we make similar inferences when we observe our own behavior. When our attitudes are weak or ambiguous, it's similar to someone observing us from the outside. Hearing myself talk informs me of my attitudes; seeing my actions provides clues to how strong my beliefs are. This is especially so when I can't easily attribute my behavior to external constraints. The acts we freely commit are self-revealing.

More than a century ago, psychologist William James proposed a similar self-perception process for our experienced emotion. How much our behavior guides our self-perceptions was cleverly demonstrated by researchers at Sweden's Lund University (Lind et al., 2014). They wondered: What would we experience if we said one thing but heard ourselves saying something else? Would we believe our ears? Through a headset, people heard themselves name various font colors such as "gray" when shown the word green in a gray color. But sometimes, the prankster researchers substituted the participant's own voice saying a previously recorded word, such as "green." Remarkably, two-thirds of the word switches went undetected. People experienced the inserted word as self-produced!

"Self-knowledge is best learned, not by contemplation, but action."
—Goethe, 1749–1832

We infer our emotions, he suggested, by observing our bodies and our behaviors. A stimulus such as a growling bear confronts a woman in the forest. She tenses, her heartbeat increases, adrenaline flows, and she runs away. Observing all this, she then experiences fear. At a college where I [DM] am to give a lecture, I awake before dawn and am unable to get back to sleep. Noting my wakefulness, I conclude that I must be anxious. One friend of mine was shaking while standing offstage waiting to give a lecture and inferred he was really nervous. When he discovered the floor over the air-handling system was vibrating, his self-perceived nervousness vanished.

EXPRESSIONS AND ATTITUDE

"I can watch myself and my actions, just like an outsider."

—Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, 1947

You may be skeptical of the self-perception effect, as I [DM] initially was. Experiments on the effects of facial expressions suggest a way for you to experience it. When James Laird (1974, 1984) induced college students to frown while attaching electrodes to their faces—"contract these muscles," "pull your brows together"—they reported feeling angry. It's more fun to try Laird's other finding: Those induced to make a smiling face felt happier and found cartoons more humorous. Those induced to repeatedly practice happy (versus sad or angry) expressions may recall more happy memories and find the happy mood lingering (Schnall & Laird, 2003). A Japanese research team created similar expressions—and emotions—by taping rubber bands to the sides of the face and then running them over either the top of the head (raising the cheeks into a smile) or under the chin (Mori & Mori, 2009).

Clever follow-up studies have found more examples of this **facial** (and body) **feedback effect:**

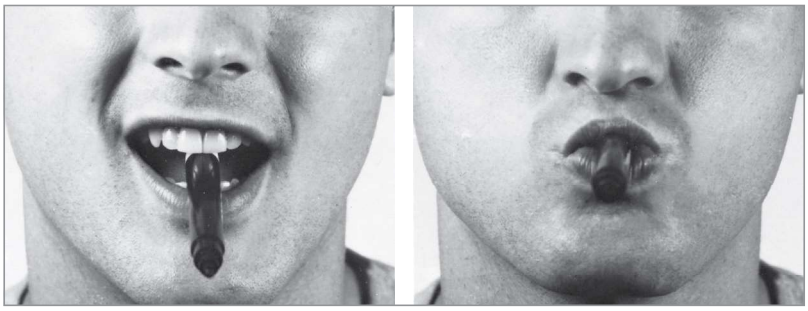
facial feedback effect
The tendency of facial expressions to trigger corresponding feelings such as fear, anger, or happiness.

- Botox smoothes emotional wrinkles. If it's hard for us to know what the frozen-faced Botoxed are feeling, it's also hard for them to know themselves. Paralyzing the frowning muscles with Botox slows activity in people's emotion-related brain circuits and slows their reading of sadness- or anger-related sentences (Havas et al., 2010; Hennenlotter et al., 2008). Botoxing the frowning muscles decreases psychiatric patients' depressive symptoms (Wollmer et al., 2012). (Increased frowning, when facing the sun, fosters aggressive feeling [Marzoli et al., 2013].) Moreover, being unable to mimic others' expressions, it's harder for them to understand others' emotions (Neal & Chartrand, 2011). Botox messes with embodied cognition.
- When people are instructed to sit straight and push out their chest, they feel more confidence in their written ideas than when sitting slouched forward and with eyes downcast (Briñol et al., 2009).
- Even word articulation movements come tinged with emotion. In a series of experiments, both German- and English-speaking people preferred nonsense words and names spoken with inward (swallowing-like) mouth movements—for example, "BENOKA"—rather than outward (spitting-like) motions, such as "KENOBA" (Topolinski et al., 2014).

We have all experienced this phenomenon. We're feeling crabby, but then the phone rings or someone comes to the door and elicits from us warm, polite behavior. "How's everything?" "Just fine, thanks. How are things with you?" "Oh, not bad. . . ." If our crabbiness was not intense, this warm behavior may change our attitude. Putting on a happy face perks us up. It's tough to smile and feel grouchy. Motions trigger emotions.

Even your gait can affect how you feel. When you get up from reading this chapter, walk for a minute taking short, shuffling steps, with eyes downcast. It's a great way to feel depressed. "Sit all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything with a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers," noted William James (1890, p. 463). Want to feel better? Walk for a minute taking long strides with your arms swinging and your eyes straight ahead. Want to feel powerful? Sit in an expansive posture, with your hands spread on a desk, or stand with your legs apart and hands on your hips rather than in a contracted posture (Carney et al., 2010; Park et al., 2013; Yap et al., 2013).

If our expressions influence our feelings, would imitating others' expressions help us know what they are feeling? An experiment by Katherine Burns Vaughan and John Lanzetta (1981) suggests it would. They asked Dartmouth College students to



According to German psychologist Fritz Strack and colleagues (1988), people find cartoons funnier while holding a pen with their teeth (using smiling muscles) than while holding it with their lips (using muscles incompatible with smiling).
Courtesy Fritz Strack



All Nippon Airways employees, biting wooden chopsticks, beam during a smile training session. Researchers report that people who use chopsticks to activate smiling muscles during laboratory stress experiences also recover more quickly (Kraft & Pressman, 2012).
Kyodo News International, Inc.

observe someone receiving electric shock. They told some of the observers to make a pained expression whenever the shock came on. If, as Freud and others supposed, expressing an emotion allows us to discharge it, then the pained expression should be inwardly calming (Cacioppo et al., 1991). However, compared with other students who did not act out the expressions, these grimacing students perspired more and had faster heart rates whenever they saw the shock being delivered. Acting out the person's emotion enabled the observers to feel more empathy. And that leads to reduced prejudice after people mimic the videotaped actions of those of another race (Inzlicht et al., 2012). So, to sense how other people are feeling, let your own face and body mirror their expressions.

"The free expression by outward signs of emotion intensifies it. On the other hand, the repression, as far as possible, of all outward signs softens our emotions."

—Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1897

Actually, you hardly need to try. Observing others' faces, postures, writing styles, and voices, we naturally and unconsciously mimic (Hatfield et al., 1992; Ireland & Pennebaker, 2010). We synchronize our movements, postures, and tones of voice with theirs. Doing so helps us tune in to what they're feeling. It also makes for "emotional contagion," which helps explain why it's fun to be around happy people and depressing to be around depressed people.

Our facial expressions also influence our attitudes. In a clever experiment, Gary Wells and Richard Petty (1980) had University of Alberta students "test headphone sets" by making either vertical or horizontal head movements while listening to a radio editorial. Who most agreed with the editorial? Those who had been nodding their heads up and down. Why? Wells and Petty surmised that positive thoughts are compatible with vertical nodding and incompatible with horizontal motion. Try it yourself when listening to someone: Do you feel more agreeable when nodding rather than shaking your head? Even being seated in a left- rather than right-leaning chair has led people to lean more left in their expressed political attitudes (Oppenheimer & Trail, 2010)!

OVERJUSTIFICATION AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS

Recall the insufficient justification effect: The smallest incentive that induces people to do something will most effectively get them to like it and keep on doing it. Cognitive dissonance theory explains this: When external inducements are insufficient to justify our behavior, we reduce dissonance internally by justifying the behavior.

Self-perception theory offers a different explanation: People explain their behavior by noting the conditions under which it occurs. Imagine hearing someone proclaim the wisdom of a tuition increase because they were paid $20. Surely the statement would seem more sincere if you thought the person was expressing those opinions for no pay. Perhaps we make similar inferences when observing ourselves. We observe our uncoerced action and infer our attitude.

Self-perception theory goes a step further. Contrary to the notion that rewards always increase motivation, unnecessary rewards can have a hidden cost. Rewarding people for doing what they already enjoy may lead them to attribute their action to the reward. If so, this would undermine their self-perception that they do it because they like it. Experiments confirmed this **overjustification effect** (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2012; Lepper & Greene, 1979). Pay people for playing with puzzles, and they will later play with the puzzles less than will those who play for no pay. Promise children a reward for doing what they intrinsically enjoy (for example, playing with markers), and you will turn their play into work (Figure 6).

A folktale illustrates the overjustification effect: An old man lived alone on a street where boys played noisily every afternoon. The din annoyed him, so one day he called the boys to his door. He told them he loved the cheerful sound of children's voices and promised them each 50 cents if they would return the next day. Next afternoon the youngsters raced back and played more lustily than ever. The old man paid them and promised another reward the next day. Again they returned, whooping it up, and the man again paid them; this time 25 cents. The following day they got only 15 cents, and the man explained that his meager resources were being exhausted. "Please, though, would you come to play for 10 cents tomorrow?" The disappointed boys told the man they would not be back. It wasn't worth the effort, they said, to play all afternoon at his house for only 10 cents.



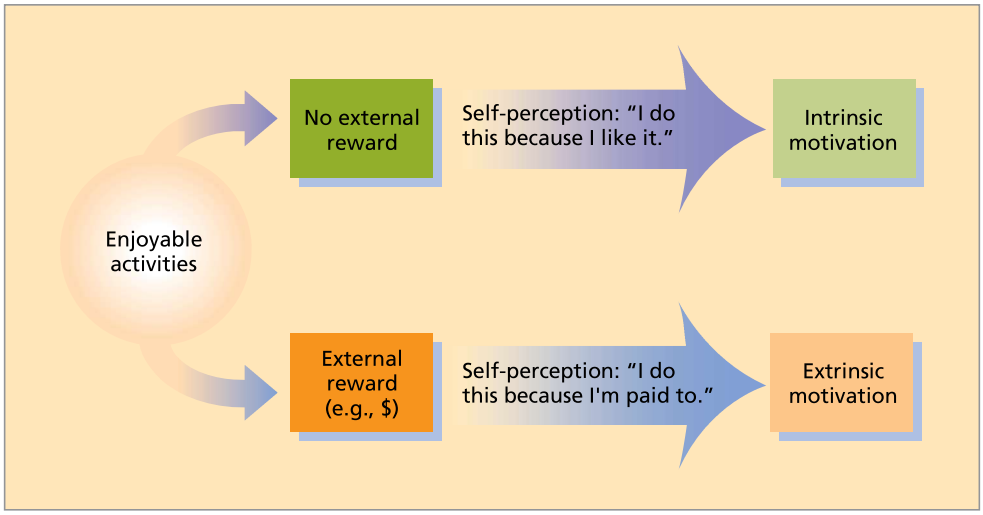
Self-perception at work.
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As self-perception theory implies, an *unanticipated* reward does not diminish intrinsic interest, because people can still attribute their actions to their own motivation (Bradley & Mannell, 1984; Tang & Hall, 1995). (It's like the heroine who, having fallen in love with the woodcutter, now learns that he's really a prince.) And if compliments for a good job make us feel more competent and successful, this can actually increase our intrinsic motivation. When rightly administered, rewards may also boost creativity (Eisenberger et al., 1999, 2003, 2009).

overjustification effect
The result of bribing people to do what they already like doing; they may then see their actions as externally controlled rather than intrinsically appealing.

Many life tasks combine intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. A nurse takes satisfaction in caring for patients and gets paid. A student learns and gets a good grade. Ironically, report Amy Wrzesnieski, Barry Schwartz and their colleagues (2014a,b), helping people focus on the intrinsic meaning of their work boosts both their work quality and their vocational and financial success.

The overjustification effect occurs when someone offers an unnecessary reward beforehand in an obvious effort to control behavior. What matters is what a reward implies: Rewards and praise that inform people of their achievements—that make them feel, "I'm very good at this"—boost intrinsic motivation. Rewards that seek to control people and lead



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FIGURE :: 6
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation
When people do something they enjoy, without reward or coercion, they attribute their behavior to their love of the activity. External rewards undermine intrinsic motivation by leading people to attribute their behavior to the incentive.

them to believe it was the reward that caused their effort—"I did it for the money"—diminish the intrinsic appeal of an enjoyable task (Rosenfeld et al., 1980; Sansone, 1986).

How then can we cultivate people's enjoyment of initially unappealing tasks? Maria may find her first piano lessons frustrating. Toshi may not have an intrinsic love of ninth-grade science. DeShawn may embark on a career not looking forward to making those first sales calls. In such cases, the parent, the teacher, or the manager should probably use some incentives to coax the desired behavior (Boggiano & Ruble, 1985; Cooke et al., 2011; Workman & Williams, 1980). After the person complies, suggest an intrinsic reason for doing so: "I'm not surprised that sales call went well, because you are so good at making a first impression."

If we provide students with just enough justification to perform a learning task and use rewards and labels to help them feel competent, we may enhance their enjoyment and their eagerness to pursue the subject on their own. When there is too much justification—as happens in classrooms where teachers dictate behavior and use rewards to control the children—student-driven learning may diminish (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 2008). My [DM's] younger son eagerly consumed 6 or 8 library books a week—until our library started a reading club that promised a party to those who read 10 books in three months. Three weeks later he began checking out only 1 or 2 books during our weekly visits. Why? "Because you only need to read 10 books, you know."

Comparing the Theories

We have seen one explanation of why our actions might only *seem* to affect our attitudes (*self-presentation* theory). And we have seen two explanations of why our actions genuinely affect our attitudes: (1) the *dissonance*-theory assumption that we justify our behavior to reduce our internal discomfort, and (2) the *self-perception*-theory assumption that we observe our behavior and make reasonable inferences about our attitudes, much as we observe other people and infer *their* attitudes.

These two explanations seem to contradict each other. Which is right? It's difficult to find a definitive test. In most instances they make the same predictions, and we can bend each theory to accommodate most of the findings we have considered (Greenwald, 1975). Self-perception theorist Daryl Bem (1972) even suggested it boils down to personal loyalties and preferences. This illustrates the human element in scientific theorizing. Neither dissonance theory nor self-perception theory has been handed to us by nature. Both are products of human imagination—creative attempts to simplify and explain what we've observed.

It is not unusual in science to find that a principle, such as "attitudes follow behavior," is predictable from more than one theory. Physicist Richard Feynman (1967) marveled that "one of the amazing characteristics of nature" is the "wide range of beautiful ways" in which we can describe it: "I do not understand the reason why it is that the correct laws of physics seem to be expressible in such a tremendous variety of ways" (pp. 53–55). Like different roads leading to the same place, different sets of assumptions can lead to the same principle. If anything, this strengthens our confidence in the principle. It becomes credible not only because of the data supporting it but also because it rests on more than one theoretical pillar.

DISSONANCE AS AROUSAL

Can we say that one of our theories is better? On one key point, strong support has emerged for dissonance theory. Recall that dissonance is, by definition, an aroused state of uncomfortable tension. To reduce that tension, we supposedly change our attitudes. Self-perception theory says nothing about tension being aroused when our actions and attitudes are not in harmony. It assumes merely that when our attitudes are weak to begin with, we will use our behavior and its circumstances as a clue to those attitudes (like the person who said, "How do I tell what I think till I see what I say?" [Forster, 1976]).

Are conditions that supposedly produce dissonance (for example, making decisions or taking actions that are contrary to one's attitudes) indeed uncomfortably arousing?

Clearly yes, providing that the behavior has unwanted consequences for which the person feels responsible (Cooper, 1999; Elliot & Devine, 1994). If, in the privacy of your room, you say something you don't believe, your dissonance will be minimal. It will be much greater if there are unpleasant results—if someone hears and believes you, if the statement causes harm and the negative effects are irrevocable, and if the person harmed is someone you like. If, moreover, you feel responsible for those consequences—if you can't easily excuse your act because you freely agreed to it and if you were able to foresee its consequences—then uncomfortable dissonance will be aroused. Such dissonance-related arousal is detectable as increased perspiration and heart rate (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986; Croyle & Cooper, 1983; Losch & Cacioppo, 1990).



After doing something undesirable or embarrassing, people can reaffirm their self-image by doing a good deed.
Ariel Skelley/Blend Images/the Agency Collection/Getty Images

Why is "volunteering" to say or do undesirable things so arousing? Because, as the **self-affirmation theory** suggests, such acts are embarrassing (Steele, 1988). They make us feel foolish. They threaten our sense of personal competence and goodness. Justifying our actions and decisions is therefore *self-affirming;* it protects and supports our sense of integrity and self-worth. When people engage in dissonance-generating actions, their thinking left frontal lobes buzz with extra arousal (Harmon-Jones et al., 2008). This is the grinding gears of belief change at work.

self-affirmation theory
A theory that (a) people often experience a self-image threat after engaging in an undesirable behavior; and (b) they can compensate by affirming another aspect of the self. Threaten people's self-concept in one domain, and they will compensate either by refocusing or by doing good deeds in some other domain.

What do you suppose happens, then, if we offer people who have committed self-contradictory acts a way to reaffirm their self-worth, such as doing good deeds? In several experiments people whose self-concepts were restored felt much less need to justify their acts (Steele et al., 1993). People with high and secure self-esteem also engage in less self-justification (Holland et al., 2002).

So, dissonance conditions do indeed arouse tension, especially when they threaten positive feelings of self-worth. But is this arousal necessary for the attitudes-follow-behavior effect? Steele and his colleagues (1981) believe the answer is yes. When drinking alcohol reduces dissonance-produced arousal, the attitudes-follow-behavior effect disappears. In one of their experiments, they induced University of Washington students to write essays favoring a big tuition increase. The students reduced their resulting dissonance by softening their antituition attitudes—*unless* after writing the unpleasant essays they drank alcohol.

SELF-PERCEIVING WHEN NOT SELF-CONTRADICTING

Dissonance is uncomfortably arousing. That makes for self-persuasion after acting contrary to one's attitudes. But dissonance theory cannot explain attitude changes that occur without dissonance. When people argue a position that is in line with their opinion, although a step or two beyond it, procedures that eliminate arousal do not eliminate attitude change (Fazio et al., 1977, 1979). Dissonance theory also does not explain the overjustification effect, because being paid to do what you like to do should not arouse great tension. And what about situations where the action does not contradict any attitude—when, for example, people are induced to smile or grimace? Here, too, there should be no dissonance. For these cases, self-perception theory has a ready explanation.

In short, dissonance theory successfully explains what happens when we act contrary to clearly defined attitudes: We feel tension, so we adjust our attitudes to reduce it. Dissonance theory, then, explains attitude *change.* In situations where our attitudes are not well formed, self-perception theory explains attitude *formation.* As we act and reflect, we develop more readily accessible attitudes to guide our future behavior (Fazio, 1987; Roese & Olson, 1994).

"Rather amazingly, 40 years after its publication, the theory of cognitive dissonance looks as strong and as interesting as ever."

—Social Psychologist Jack W. Brehm (1999)

SUMMING UP: Why Does Our Behavior Affect Our Attitudes?

Three competing theories explain why our actions affect our attitude reports.

- *Self-presentation theory* assumes that people, especially those who self-monitor their behavior hoping to create good impressions, will adapt their attitude reports to appear consistent with their actions. The available evidence confirms that people do adjust their attitude statements out of concern for what other people will think. But it also shows that some genuine attitude change occurs.

Two of these theories propose that our actions trigger genuine attitude change.

- *Dissonance theory* explains this attitude change by assuming that we feel tension after acting contrary to our attitudes or making difficult decisions. To reduce that arousal, we internally justify our behavior. Dissonance theory further proposes that the less external justification we have for our undesirable actions, the more we feel responsible for them, and thus the more dissonance arises and the more attitudes change.
- *Self-perception theory* assumes that when our attitudes are weak, we simply observe our behavior and its circumstances, then infer our attitudes. One interesting implication of self-perception theory is the "overjustification effect": Rewarding people to do what they like doing anyway can turn their pleasure into drudgery (if the reward leads them to attribute their behavior to the reward).
- Evidence supports predictions from both theories, suggesting that each describes what happens under certain conditions.

POSTSCRIPT: Changing Ourselves Through Action

To make anything a habit, do it.
To not make it a habit, do not do it.
To unmake a habit, do something else in place of it.
—*Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus*

This chapter's attitudes-follow-behavior principle offers a powerful lesson for life: If we want to change ourselves in some important way, it's best not to wait for insight or inspiration. Sometimes we need to act—to begin to write that paper, to make those phone calls, to see that person—even if we don't feel like acting. Jacques Barzun (1975) recognized the energizing power of action when he advised aspiring writers to engage in the act of writing even if contemplation had left them feeling uncertain about their ideas:

> If you are too modest about yourself or too plain indifferent about the possible reader and yet are required to write, then you have to pretend. Make believe that you want to bring somebody around to your opinion; in other words, adopt a thesis and start expounding it. . . . With a slight effort of the kind at the start—a challenge to utterance—you will find your pretense disappearing and a real concern creeping in. The subject will have taken hold of you as it does in the work of all habitual writers. (pp. 173–174)

"If we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves we must . . . coldbloodedly go through the outward motions of those contrary dispositions we prefer to cultivate."

—William James, "What Is an Emotion?", 1884

This attitudes-follow-behavior phenomenon is not irrational or magical. That which prompts us to act may also prompt us to think. Writing an essay or role-playing an opposing view forces us to consider arguments we otherwise might have ignored. Also, we remember information best after explaining it in our own terms. As one student wrote me [DM], "It wasn't until I tried to verbalize my beliefs that I really understood them." As a teacher and a writer, I must therefore remind myself to not always lay out finished results. It is better to stimulate students to think through the implications of a theory, to make them active listeners and readers. Even taking notes deepens the impression. William James (1899) made the point a century ago: "No reception without reaction, no impression without correlative expression—this is the great maxim which the teacher ought never to forget."

Social Beliefs and Judgments

CHAPTER 3



Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

There is curious power to partisanship. Consider American politics:

- When a Democrat is President, Democrats say Presidents can't do anything about high gas prices. Republicans say the same when a Republican is President. But when the President is from the opposing party, both believe Presidents *can* affect gas prices (Vedantam, 2012).
- Forty-eight percent of political liberals believed most Americans favored same-sex marriage, but only 16% of conservatives thought this was the majority opinion (Gallup, 2013).
- The taller candidate has won the U.S. Presidential election 58% of the time, and Presidents are taller than the average man (Murray & Schmitz, 2011; Stulp et al., 2013). The average male company CEO is 3 inches taller than the average man. We perceive those who look like leaders to be leaders, even if they are not.

"Motivated reasoning"—such as a gut-level liking or disliking of certain politicians—can powerfully influence how we interpret evidence and view reality. Partisanship

How do we judge our social worlds, consciously and unconsciously?

How do we perceive our social worlds?

How do we explain our social worlds?

How do our social beliefs matter?

What can we conclude about social beliefs and judgments?

Postscript: Reflecting on illusory thinking

predisposes perceptions—and perceptions predict partisanship. As an old Chinese proverb says, "Two-thirds of what we see is behind our eyes."

Such differing responses, which have been replicated in political perceptions throughout the world, illustrate how we construct social perceptions and beliefs as we

- *judge* events, informed by implicit rules that guide our snap judgments, and by our moods;
- *perceive* and recall events through the filters of our own assumptions;
- *explain* events by sometimes attributing them to the situation, sometimes to the person; and
- *expect* certain events, thereby sometimes helping bring them about.

This chapter explores how we judge, perceive, and explain our social worlds and why our expectations matter.

HOW DO WE JUDGE OUR SOCIAL WORLDS, CONSCIOUSLY AND UNCONSCIOUSLY?

Understand how judgments are influenced by both unconscious and conscious systems.

System 1
The intuitive, automatic, unconscious, and fast way of thinking.

System 2
The deliberate, controlled, conscious, and slower way of thinking.

We have two brain systems, notes Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). **System 1** functions automatically and out of our awareness (often called "intuition" or a "gut feeling"), whereas **System 2** requires our conscious attention and effort. The big lesson of recent research: System 1 influences more of our actions than we realize.

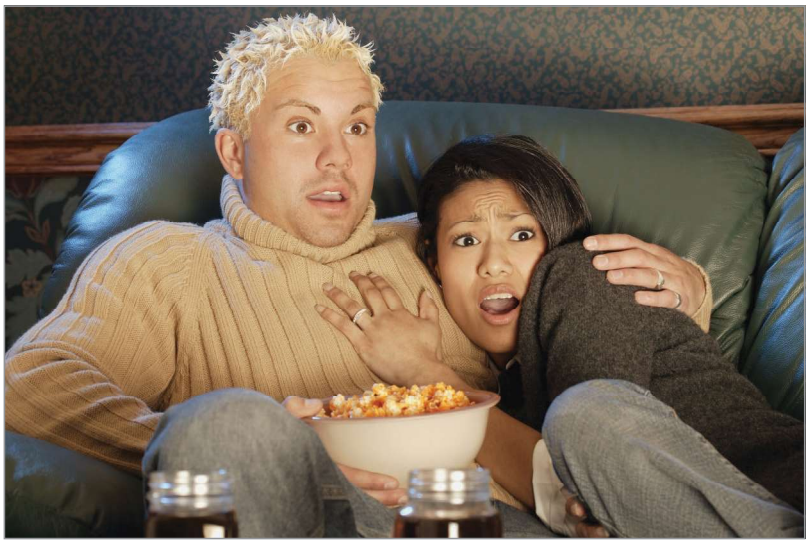
Priming

priming
Activating particular associations in memory.

Things we don't even consciously notice can subtly influence how we interpret and recall events. Imagine wearing earphones and concentrating on ambiguous spoken sentences such as "We stood by the bank." When a pertinent word (*river* or *money*) is simultaneously sent to your other ear, you don't consciously hear it. Yet the unheard word "primes" your interpretation of the sentence (Baars & McGovern, 1994).

Our memory system is a web of associations, and **priming** is the awakening or activating of certain associations. Experiments show that priming one thought, even without awareness, can influence another thought, or even an action (Herring et al., 2013). John Bargh has likened primes to bells that only mental butlers (who manage the small unconscious stuff) can hear. In a host of studies, priming effects surface even when the stimuli are presented subliminally—too briefly to be perceived consciously. What's out of sight may not be completely out of mind. An electric shock too slight to be felt may increase the perceived intensity of a later shock. An imperceptibly flashed word, "bread," may prime people to detect a related word, such as "butter," more quickly than they detect an unrelated word, such as "bottle" or "bubble" (Epley et al., 1999; Merikle et al., 2001). In each case, an invisible image or word primes a response to a later task. In another experiment, students were more likely to wobble on a balance beam in a room with posters of beer and vodka as opposed to apple or orange juice (Cox et al., 2014). German students who were subliminally exposed to words such as "sexuality," "sweat," "stiff," and "bed" behaved in a more gender-stereotypical way (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012). These reminders of alcohol and sex primed people to behave in ways associated with alcohol and sex—even though they weren't aware they were being influenced.

Unnoticed events can also subtly prime our thinking and behavior. Rob Holland and colleagues (2005) observed that Dutch students exposed to the scent of an all-purpose cleaner were quicker to identify cleaning-related words, recalled more cleaning-related activities when describing their day, and even kept their desk cleaner while eating a crumbly cookie. Another team of Dutch psychologists found that people exposed to the scent of a cleaning product were less likely to litter (de Lange et al., 2012). And in a laboratory experiment, exposure to a fishy smell caused people to be suspicious of each other and cooperate less—priming notions of a shady deal as "fishy" (Lee & Schwarz, 2012). All these effects occurred without the participants' conscious awareness of the scent and its influence.



Prime time. Watching a scary movie can later make a creaking house sound like an intruder. Holding a warm drink or a soft ball (rather than a cold drink or hard ball) can make another person seem warmer and kinder.
Don Hammond/DesignPics

Priming experiments have their counterparts in everyday life, reports John Bargh (2006):

- Watching a scary movie alone at home can activate emotions that, without our realizing it, cause us to interpret furnace noises as a possible intruder. I [JT] experienced a version of this: Returning to my New Orleans hotel room after a "ghost tour," a shadow I hadn't noticed before looked ominous. Further inspection yielded not a ghost but an end table at a strange angle.
- Depressed moods, as this chapter explains later, prime negative associations. But put people in a *good* mood and suddenly their past seems more wonderful, their future brighter.
- For many psychology students, reading about psychological disorders primes how they interpret their own anxieties and gloomy moods. Reading about disease symptoms similarly primes medical students to worry about their congestion, fever, or headache.

Studies of how implanted ideas and images can prime our interpretations and recall illustrate one of this book's take-home lessons: *Much of our social information processing is automatic.* It is unintentional, out of sight, and happens without our conscious awareness—relying on System 1. As John Bargh and Tanya Chartrand (1999) explain, "Most of a person's everyday life is determined not by their conscious intentions and deliberate choices but by mental processes that are put into motion by features of the environment and that operate outside of conscious awareness and guidance."

Even physical sensations, thanks to our **embodied cognition,** prime our social judgments and vice versa:

embodied cognition
The mutual influence of bodily sensations on cognitive preferences and social judgments.

- After receiving a cold shoulder treatment or after assessing a cold person, people judge the room as colder than do those treated warmly or after assessing a warm person (Szymkow et al., 2013; Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008). People who hold an ice pack straight from the freezer feel more lonely than those who hold the same pack warmed to 98 degrees (Bargh & Shalev, 2012). People who ate alone judged room temperature as colder than those who ate with others (Lee et al., 2014). Social exclusion literally feels cold, and cold feels like social exclusion.
- When holding a *hard* rather than *soft* ball, people judge the same face as more likely to be Republican than Democrat, and more likely to be a physicist than a historian (Slepian et al., 2012).

- People asked to carry a basket (vs. pushing a cart) while shopping were three times more likely to impulse buy unhealthy items like candy—because, the researchers theorize, the arm flex of holding a basket mimics the motion we make when grabbing a desired object (Van Den Bergh et al., 2011).
- When sitting in a wobbly chair, people rate other couples' relationships as more unstable (Kille et al., 2013).

The bottom line: Our social cognition is embodied. The brain systems that process our bodily sensations communicate with the brain systems responsible for our social thinking.

Intuitive Judgments

What are our powers of intuition—of immediately knowing something without reasoning or analysis? Advocates of "intuitive management" believe we should tune into our hunches—to use System 1. When judging others, they say, we should plug into the non-logical smarts of our "right brain." When hiring, firing, and investing, we should listen to our premonitions. In making judgments, we should trust the force within.

Are the intuitionists right that important information is immediately available apart from our conscious analysis? Or are the skeptics correct in saying that intuition is "our knowing we are right, whether we are or not"?

Priming research hints that the unconscious indeed controls much of our behavior. When the light turns red, we react and hit the brake before consciously deciding to do so. Indeed, reflect Neil Macrae and Lucy Johnston (1998), "to be able to do just about anything at all (e.g., driving, dating, dancing), action initiation needs to be decoupled from the inefficient (i.e., slow, serial, resource-consuming) workings of the conscious mind, otherwise inaction inevitably would prevail."

THE POWERS OF INTUITION

"The heart has its reasons which reason does not know," observed seventeenth-century philosopher-mathematician Blaise Pascal. Three centuries later, scientists have proved Pascal correct. We know more than we know we know. Studies of our unconscious information processing confirm our limited access to what's going on in our minds (Bargh et al., 2012; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Our thinking is partly **automatic** (impulsive, effortless, and without our awareness—System 1) and partly **controlled** (reflective, deliberate, and conscious—System 2). Automatic, intuitive thinking occurs not "onscreen" but offscreen, out of sight, where reason does not go. Consider these examples of automatic thinking:

automatic processing
"Implicit" thinking that is effortless, habitual, and without awareness; roughly corresponds to "intuition." Also known as System 1.

controlled processing
"Explicit" thinking that is deliberate, reflective, and conscious. Also known as System 2.

- *Schemas* are mental concepts or templates that intuitively guide our perceptions and interpretations. Whether we hear someone speaking of religious *sects* or *sex* depends on how we automatically interpret the sound.
- *Emotional reactions* are often nearly instantaneous, happening before there is time for deliberate thinking. One neural shortcut takes information from the eye or the ear to the brain's sensory switchboard (the thalamus) and out to its emotional control center (the amygdala) before the thinking cortex has had any chance to intervene (LeDoux, 2002, 2014). Our ancestors who intuitively feared a sound in the bushes were usually fearing nothing. But when they were right and the sound was made by a dangerous predator, they became more likely to survive to pass their genes down to us.
- Given sufficient *expertise,* people may intuitively know the answer to a problem. Many skills, from piano playing to swinging a golf club, begin as a controlled, deliberate process and gradually become automatic and intuitive (Kruglanski & Gigerenzer, 2011). Master chess players intuitively recognize meaningful patterns that novices miss and often make their next move with only a glance at the board, as the situation cues information stored in their memory. Similarly, without knowing quite how, we recognize a friend's voice after the first spoken word of a phone conversation.

- Given but a very thin slice of someone—even just a fraction of a second glance at their photo—people's *snap judgments* can beat chance at guessing whether someone is outgoing or shy, straight or gay (Rule, 2014).

Some things—facts, names, and past experiences—we remember explicitly (consciously) using System 2. But other things—skills and conditioned dispositions—we remember *implicitly* with System 1, without consciously knowing or declaring that we know. It's true of us all but most strikingly evident in people with brain damage who cannot form new explicit memories. One such person never could learn to recognize her doctor, who would need to reintroduce himself each day. One day, the doctor affixed a tack to his hand, causing the patient to jump with pain when they shook hands. When the physician next returned, the patient still didn't explicitly recognize him. But, due to her implicit memory, she wouldn't shake his hand.

Equally dramatic are the cases of *blindsight.* Having lost a portion of the visual cortex to surgery or stroke, people may be functionally blind in part of their field of vision. Shown a series of sticks in the blind field, they report seeing nothing. After guessing whether the sticks are vertical or horizontal, the patients are astounded when told, "You got them all right." Like the patient who "remembered" the painful handshake, these people know more than they know they know.

Consider your own taken-for-granted capacity to recognize a face. As you look at it, your brain breaks the visual information into subdimensions, such as color, depth, movement, and form, and works on each aspect simultaneously before reassembling the components. Finally, using automatic processing, your brain compares the perceived image with previously stored images. Voilà! Instantly and effortlessly, you recognize your grandmother. If intuition is immediately knowing something without reasoned analysis, then perceiving is intuition par excellence.

So, many routine cognitive functions occur automatically, unintentionally, without awareness. We might remember how automatic processing helps us get through life by picturing our minds as functioning like large corporations. Our CEO—our controlled consciousness—attends to many of the most important, complex, and novel issues, while subordinates deal with routine affairs and matters requiring instant action. Like a CEO, consciousness sets goals and priorities, often with little knowledge of operational activities in the underlying departments. This delegation of resources enables us to react to many situations quickly and efficiently. The bottom line: Our brain knows much more than it tells us.

THE LIMITS OF INTUITION

We have seen how automatic, intuitive thinking can "make us smart" (Gigerenzer, 2007, 2010). Elizabeth Loftus and Mark Klinger (1992) nevertheless spoke for other cognitive scientists in having doubts about the brilliance of intuition. They reported "a general consensus that the unconscious may not be as smart as previously believed." For example, although subliminal stimuli can trigger a weak, fleeting response—enough to evoke a feeling if not conscious awareness—there is no evidence that (for example) subliminal audio recordings can "reprogram your unconscious mind" for success. In fact, a significant body of evidence indicates that they can't (Greenwald, 1992).

Social psychologists have explored not only our error-prone hindsight judgments but also our capacity for illusion—for perceptual misinterpretations, fantasies, and constructed beliefs. Michael Gazzaniga (1992, 1998, 2008) reports that patients whose brain hemispheres have been surgically separated will instantly fabricate—and believe—explanations of their own puzzling behaviors. If the patient gets up and takes a few steps after the experimenter flashes the instruction "walk" to the patient's nonverbal right hemisphere, the verbal left hemisphere will instantly provide the patient with a plausible explanation ("I felt like getting a drink").

Illusory intuition also appears in how we take in, store, and retrieve social information. As perception researchers study visual illusions for what they reveal about our normal perceptual mechanisms, social psychologists study illusory thinking for what it reveals about normal information processing. These researchers want to give us a map of everyday social thinking, with the hazards clearly marked.

As we examine these efficient thinking patterns, remember this: Demonstrations of how people create false beliefs do not prove that all beliefs are false (although to recognize falsification, it helps to know how it's done).

Overconfidence

So far we have seen that our cognitive systems process a vast amount of information efficiently and automatically. But our efficiency has a trade-off; as we interpret our experiences and construct memories, our automatic System 1 intuitions are sometimes wrong. Usually, we are unaware of our errors—in other words, we display **overconfidence.**

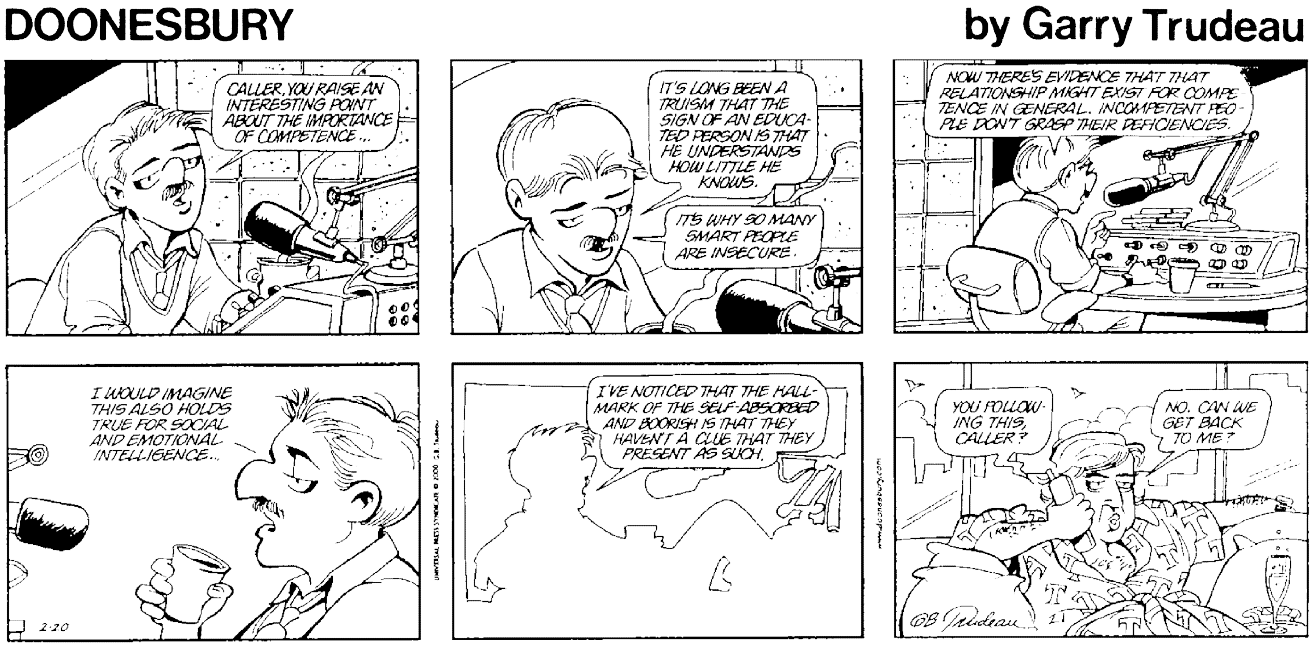
overconfidence phenomenon
The tendency to be more confident than correct—to overestimate the accuracy of one's beliefs.

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979) gave people factual statements and asked them to fill in the blanks, as in the following sentence: "I feel 98 percent certain that the air distance between New Delhi and Beijing is more than _____ miles but less than _____ miles." Most individuals were overconfident: Approximately 30 percent of the time, the correct answers lay outside the range they felt 98 percent confident about. Even when participants were offered lottery tickets for a correct answer, they were still too overconfident, identifying too narrow a range (also known as overprecision). "The consequences of overprecision are profound," note Albert Mannes and Don Moore (2013, p. 1196). "People frequently cut things too close—arriving late, missing planes, [or] bouncing checks." In thinking we know exactly how something will go, we too often miss the window.

Ironically, *incompetence feeds overconfidence.* It takes competence to recognize competence, note Justin Kruger and David Dunning (1999). Students who score the lowest on tests of grammar, humor, and logic are the most prone to overestimating their abilities. Those who don't know what good logic or grammar is are often unaware that they lack it. If you make a list of all the words you can form out of the letters in "psychology," you may feel brilliant—but then stupid when a friend starts naming the ones you missed. Deanna Caputo and David Dunning (2005) re-created this phenomenon in experiments, confirming that our ignorance of our ignorance sustains our self-confidence. Follow-up studies found that this "ignorance of one's incompetence" occurs mostly on relatively easy-seeming tasks. On more obviously difficult tasks, poor performers more often appreciate their lack of skill (Burson et al., 2006).

The air distance between New Delhi and Beijing is 2,500 miles.

Robert Vallone and colleagues (1990) had college students predict in September whether they would drop a course, declare a major, elect to live off campus next year, and so forth.



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Although the students felt, on average, 84 percent sure of those self-predictions, they were wrong nearly twice as often as they expected to be. Even when feeling 100 percent sure of their predictions, they erred 15 percent of the time. Ignorance of one's incompetence helps explain David Dunning's (2005) startling conclusion from employee assessment studies that "what others see in us . . . tends to be more highly correlated with objective outcomes than what we see in ourselves." If ignorance can beget false confidence, then—yikes!—where, we may ask, are you and I unknowingly deficient?

In estimating their chances for success on a task, such as a major exam, people's confidence runs highest when the moment of truth is off in the future. By exam day, the possibility of failure looms larger and confidence typically drops (Gilovich et al., 1993; Shepperd et al., 2005). These students are not alone:



The perils of overconfidence. Before its exploded drilling platform spewed oil into the Gulf of Mexico, BP downplayed safety concerns, and then was overconfident that the spill would be modest (Mohr et al., 2010; Urbina, 2010).
U.S. Coast Guard/Handout/Getty Images News/Getty Images

- *Stockbroker overconfidence.* Investment experts market their services with the confident presumption that they can beat the stock market average, forgetting that for every stockbroker or buyer saying "Sell!" at a given price, there is another saying "Buy!" A stock's price is the balance point between those mutually confident judgments. Thus, incredible as it may seem, economist Burton Malkiel (2012) reports that mutual fund portfolios selected by investment analysts have not outperformed randomly selected stocks.
- *Political overconfidence.* Overconfident decision makers can wreak havoc. It was a confident Adolf Hitler who from 1939 to 1945 waged war against the rest of Europe. It was a confident Lyndon Johnson who in the 1960s invested U.S. weapons and soldiers in the effort to salvage democracy in South Vietnam. It was a confident George W. Bush who asserted that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in 2003, but none were ever found.
- *Student overconfidence.* In one study, students memorizing psychology terms for a test typed in each term's definition and then predicted how much credit they expected to receive. The overconfident students—those who thought they were more accurate than they actually were—did worse on the test, mostly because they stopped studying (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012). Why does overconfidence persist? Perhaps because we like those who are confident: Group members rewarded highly confident individuals with higher status—even when their confidence was not justified by actual ability. Overconfident individuals spoke first, talked longer, and used a more factual tone, making them appear more competent than they actually were (Anderson et al., 2012). Even when groups worked together repeatedly and learned that the overconfident individuals were not as accurate as presented, group members continued to accord them status (Kennedy et al., 2013). If confidence, but not ability, helps people become leaders, pervasive overconfidence seems less surprising—but perhaps more distressing.

"The wise know too well their weakness to assume infallibility; and he who knows most, knows best how little he knows."

—Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*

Regarding the atomic bomb: "That is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. The bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives."

—Admiral William Leahy to President Truman, 1945

"When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it; this is knowledge."

—Confucius, *Analects*

CONFIRMATION BIAS

People also tend not to seek information that might disprove what they believe. P. C. Wason (1960) demonstrated this, as you can, by giving participants a sequence of three numbers—2, 4, 6—that conformed to a rule he had in mind. (The rule was simply *any*

three ascending numbers.) To enable the participants to discover the rule, Wason invited each person to generate additional sets of three numbers. Each time, Wason told the person whether or not the set conformed to his rule. As soon as participants were sure they had discovered the rule, they were to stop and announce it.

The result? Seldom right but never in doubt: 23 of the 29 participants convinced themselves of a wrong rule. They typically formed some erroneous belief about the rule (for example, counting by two's) and then searched for *confirming* evidence (for example, by testing 8, 10, 12) rather than attempting to *disconfirm* their hunches. We are eager to verify our beliefs but less inclined to seek evidence that might disprove them, a phenomenon called the **confirmation bias.**

confirmation bias
A tendency to search for information that confirms one's preconceptions.

Confirmation bias appears to be a System 1 snap judgment, where our default reaction is to look for information consistent with our presupposition. Stopping and thinking a little—calling up System 2—makes us less likely to commit this error. For example, Ivan Hernandez and Jesse Lee Preston (2013) had college students read an article arguing for the death penalty. Those who read the article in a dark, standard font did not change their opinions. But when the words were in light gray and italics, more shifted their beliefs—probably because straining to read the words slowed down participants' thinking enough for them to consider both sides. Another cognitive complication (thinking about conflicting goals such as going to a party the night before an exam) also made students less likely to commit confirmation bias (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013). Contemplation curtails confirmation.

Confirmation bias helps explain why our self-images are so remarkably stable. In experiments at the University of Texas at Austin, William Swann and Stephen Read (1981; Swann et al., 1992a, 1992b, 2007) discovered that students seek, elicit, and recall feedback that confirms their beliefs about themselves. People seek as friends and spouses those who bolster their own self views—even if they think poorly of themselves (Swann et al., 1991, 2003).

Swann and Read (1981) compared this *self-verification* to the way a domineering person might behave at a party. When she arrives, she seeks out those whom she knows will acknowledge her dominance. In conversation, she presents her views in ways that elicit the respect she expects. After the party, she has trouble recalling conversations in which her influence was minimal and more easily recalls her persuasiveness in the conversations she dominated. Thus, her experience at the party confirms her self-image.

REMEDIES FOR OVERCONFIDENCE

What lessons can we draw from research on overconfidence? One lesson is to be wary of other people's dogmatic statements. Even when people are sure they are right, they may be wrong. Confidence and competence need not coincide.

Three techniques have successfully reduced the overconfidence bias. One is *prompt feedback* (Lichtenstein & Fischhoff, 1980). In everyday life, weather forecasters and those who set the odds in horse racing both receive clear, daily feedback. And experts in both groups do quite well at estimating their probable accuracy (Fischhoff, 1982).

When people think about why an idea *might* be true, it begins to seem true (Koehler, 1991). Thus, a third way to reduce overconfidence is to get people to think of one good reason *why* their judgments *might be wrong;* that is, force them to consider disconfirming information (Koriat et al., 1980). Managers might foster more realistic judgments by insisting that all proposals and recommendations include reasons why they might *not* work.

Still, we should be careful not to undermine people's reasonable self-confidence or to destroy their decisiveness. In times when their wisdom is needed, those lacking self-confidence may shrink from speaking up or making tough decisions. Overconfidence can cost us, but realistic self-confidence is adaptive.

Heuristics: Mental Shortcuts

With precious little time to process so much information, our cognitive system is fast and frugal. It specializes in mental shortcuts. With remarkable ease, we form impressions,

make judgments, and invent explanations. We do so by using **heuristics**—simple, efficient thinking strategies. Heuristics enable us to make routine decisions with minimal effort (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). In most situations, our System 1 snap generalizations—"That's dangerous!"—are adaptive. The speed of these intuitive guides promotes our survival. The biological purpose of thinking is less to make us right than to keep us alive. In some situations, however, haste makes error.

heuristic
A thinking strategy that enables quick, efficient judgments.

THE REPRESENTATIVENESS HEURISTIC

University of Oregon students were told that a panel of psychologists interviewed 30 engineers and 70 lawyers and summarized their impressions in thumbnail descriptions. The following description, they were told, was drawn at random from the sample of 30 engineers and 70 lawyers:

> Twice divorced, Frank spends most of his free time hanging around the country club. His clubhouse bar conversations often center on his regrets at having tried to follow his esteemed father's footsteps. The long hours he had spent at academic drudgery would have been better invested in learning how to be less quarrelsome in his relations with other people.
>
> *Question:* What is the probability that Frank is a lawyer rather than an engineer?

Asked to guess Frank's occupation, more than 80 percent of the students surmised he was one of the lawyers (Fischhoff & Bar-Hillel, 1984). Fair enough. But how do you suppose those estimates changed when the sample description was given to another group of students, modified to say that 70 percent were engineers? Not in the slightest. The students took no account of the base rate of engineers (70 percent) and lawyers (30 percent); in their minds, Frank was more *representative* of lawyers, and that was all that seemed to matter. Or consider John, a 23-year-old White man who's an atheist and abuses drugs. What kind of music does he like? Most people guessed heavy metal, even though heavy metal fans are a very small minority of the population (Lonsdale & North, 2011).

To judge something by intuitively comparing it to our mental representation of a category is to use the **representativeness heuristic.** Representativeness (typicalness) usually reflects reality. But, as we saw with "Frank" above, it doesn't always. Consider Linda, who is 31, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy in college. As a student, she was deeply concerned with discrimination and other social issues, and she participated in antinuclear demonstrations. Based on that description, would you say it is more likely that

representativeness heuristic
The tendency to presume, sometimes despite contrary odds, that someone or something belongs to a particular group if resembling (representing) a typical member.

a. Linda is a bank teller.
b. Linda is a bank teller and active in the feminist movement.

Most people think *b* is more likely, partly because Linda better *represents* their image of feminists (Mellers et al., 2001). But ask yourself: Is there a better chance that Linda is *both* a bank teller *and* a feminist than that she's a bank teller (whether feminist or not)? As Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1983) reminded us, the conjunction of two events cannot be more likely than either one of the events alone.

THE AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC

Consider the following: Do more people live in Iraq or in Tanzania?

You probably answered according to how readily Iraqis and Tanzanians come to mind. If examples are readily *available* in our memory—as Iraqis tend to be—then we presume that other such examples are commonplace. Usually this is true, so we are often well served by this cognitive rule, called the **availability heuristic** (Table 1). Said simply, the more easily we recall something, the more likely it seems. *(Answer: Tanzania's 52 million people greatly outnumber Iraq's 36 million. Most people, having more vivid images of Iraqi's, guess wrong.)*

availability heuristic
A cognitive rule that judges the likelihood of things in terms of their availability in memory. If instances of something come readily to mind, we presume it to be commonplace.

But sometimes the rule deludes us. If people hear a list of famous people of one sex (Oprah Winfrey, Lady Gaga, and Hillary Clinton) intermixed with an equal-size list of

TABLE :: 1 Fast and Frugal Heuristics

Heuristic	Definition	Example	But May Lead to
Representativeness	Snap judgments of whether someone or something fits a category	Deciding that Carlos is a librarian rather than a trucker because he better represents one's image of librarians	Discounting other important information
Availability	Quick judgments of likelihood of events (how available in memory)	Estimating teen violence after school shootings	Overweighting vivid instances and thus, for example, fearing the wrong things

unfamous people of the other sex (Donald Scarr, William Wood, and Mel Jasper), the famous names will later be more cognitively available. Most people will also subsequently recall having heard more women's names (McKelvie, 1995, 1997; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Likewise, media attention makes gays and lesbians cognitively available. Thus, the average U.S. adult in a 2011 Gallup poll estimated that 25 percent of Americans are gay or lesbian (Morales, 2011)—nearly ten times the number who, in surveys, self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Gates, 2011).

Even fictional happenings in novels, television, and movies leave images that later penetrate our judgments (Gerrig & Prentice, 1991; Green et al., 2002; Mar & Oatley, 2008). The more absorbed and "transported" the reader ("I could easily picture the events"), the more the story affects the reader's later beliefs (Diekman et al., 2000). Readers who are captivated by romance novels, for example, may gain readily available sexual scripts that influence their own sexual perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Try ordering these four cities according to their crime rates: Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York, St. Louis. If, with available images from TV crime dramas in mind, you thought New York and Los Angeles were the most crime-ridden, guess again; they each have about one-third the crime rate of Atlanta and St. Louis (FBI, 2012).

"Most people reason dramatically, not quantitatively."

—Jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 1841–1935

Our use of the availability heuristic highlights a basic principle of social thinking: People are slow to deduce particular instances from a general truth, but they are remarkably quick to infer general truth from a vivid instance. No wonder that after hearing and reading stories of rapes, robberies, and beatings, 9 out of 10 Canadians overestimated—usually by a considerable margin—the percentage of crimes that involved violence (Doob & Roberts, 1988). No wonder that South Africans, after a series of headline-grabbing gangland robberies and slayings, estimated that violent crime had almost doubled between 1998 and 2004, when actually it had decreased substantially (Wines, 2005). And no wonder the breakfast server at a hotel for stranded airline passengers told me [DM] that, after hearing so many vivid stories of flights delayed by weather and mechanical problems, she would *never* fly.

The availability heuristic explains why vivid, easy-to-imagine events, such as shark attacks or diseases with easy-to-picture symptoms, may seem more likely to occur than harder-to-picture events (MacLeod & Campbell, 1992; Sherman et al., 1985). Likewise, powerful anecdotes can be more compelling than statistical information. We fret over extremely rare child abduction, even if we don't buckle children in the backseat. We dread terrorism but are indifferent to global climate change—"Armageddon in slow motion." Especially after the 2011 Japanese tsunami and nuclear power catastrophe, we have feared nuclear power, with little concern for the many more deaths related to coal mining and burning (von Hippel, 2011). In short, we worry about remote possibilities while ignoring higher probabilities, a phenomenon that social scientists call our "probability neglect."

Because news footage of airplane crashes is a readily available memory for most of us—especially since September 11, 2001, and the two Malaysia Airlines crashes in 2014—we often suppose we are more at risk traveling in commercial airplanes than in cars. Actually, from 2009 to 2011, U.S. travelers were 170 times more likely to die in a

car crash than on a commercial flight covering the same distance (National Safety Council, 2014). For most air travelers, the most dangerous part of the journey is the drive to the airport.

Soon after 9/11, as many people abandoned air travel and took to the roads, I [DM] estimated that if Americans flew 20 percent less and instead drove those unflown miles, we could expect an additional 800 traffic deaths in the ensuing year (Myers, 2001). A curious German researcher (why didn't I think of this?) checked that prediction against accident data, which confirmed an excess of some 350 deaths in the last 3 months of 2001 compared with the 3-month average in the preceding 5 years (Gigerenzer, 2004). The 9/11 terrorists appear to have killed more people unnoticed—on America's roads—than they did with the 266 fatalities on those four planes.



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By now it is clear that our naive statistical intuitions, and our resulting fears, are driven not by calculation and reason but by emotions attuned to the availability heuristic. After this book is published, there likely will be another dramatic natural or terrorist event, which will again propel our fears, vigilance, and resources in a new direction. Terrorists, aided by the media, may again achieve their objective of capturing our attention, draining our resources, and distracting us from the mundane, undramatic, insidious risks that, over time, devastate lives, such as the rotavirus (an intestinal infection) that each day claims the equivalent of four 747s filled with children (Parashar et al., 2006). But then again, dramatic events can also serve to awaken us to real risks. That, say some scientists, is what happens when extreme weather events remind us that global climate change, by raising sea levels and spawning extreme weather, is destined to become nature's own weapon of mass destruction. For Australians and Americans, a hot day can prime people to believe more in global warming (Li et al., 2011). Even feeling hot in an *indoor* room increases people's belief in global warming (Risen & Critcher, 2011).

"Testimonials may be more compelling than mountains of facts and figures (as mountains of facts and figures in social psychology so compellingly demonstrate)."

—Mark Snyder (1988)



Vivid, memorable—and therefore cognitively available—events influence our perception of the social world. The resulting "probability neglect" often leads people to fear the wrong things, such as fearing flying or terrorism more than smoking, driving, or climate change. If four jumbo jets filled with children crashed every day—approximating the number of childhood diarrhea deaths resulting from the rotavirus—something would have been done about it.

Source: Dave Bohn

Counterfactual Thinking

Easily imagined, cognitively available events also influence our experiences of guilt, regret, frustration, and relief. If our team loses (or wins) a big game by one point, we can easily imagine the other outcome, and thus we feel regret (or relief). Imagining worse alternatives helps us feel better. When skier Lindsay Vonn lost a World Cup slalom event by just 0.03 seconds, she was happy for her competitor but noted that "I'd rather she beat me by a second" (AP, 2012). Imagining better alternatives, and pondering what we might do differently next time, helps us prepare to do better in the future (Epstude & Roese, 2008; Scholl & Sassenberg, 2014).

counterfactual thinking
Imagining alternative scenarios and outcomes that might have happened, but didn't.

In Olympic competition, athletes' emotions after an event reflect mostly how they did relative to expectations, but also their **counterfactual thinking**—their *mentally simulating what might have been* (McGraw et al., 2005; Medvec et al., 1995). Bronze medalists (for whom an easily imagined alternative was finishing fourth—without a medal) exhibit more joy than silver medalists (who could more easily imagine having won the gold). On the medal stand, happiness is as simple as 1-3-2. Similarly, the higher a student's score within a grade category (such as B+), the *worse* they feel (Medvec & Savitsky, 1997). The B+ student who misses an A– by a point feels worse than the B+ student who actually did worse and just made a B+ by a point. In sports games or TV game shows, near misses are especially distressing when they occur near the end of the competition when there is little chance for future success (Zhang & Covey, 2014).

Such counterfactual thinking—imagining what could have been—occurs when we can easily picture an alternative outcome (Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Markman & McMullen, 2003; Petrocelli et al., 2011):

- If we barely miss a plane or a bus, we imagine making it *if only* we had left at our usual time, taken our usual route, or not paused to talk. If we miss our connection by a half hour or after taking our usual route, it's harder to simulate a different outcome, so we feel less frustration.
- If we change an exam answer, then get it wrong, we will inevitably think "If only . . ." and will vow next time to trust our immediate intuition—although, contrary to student lore, answer changes are more often from incorrect to correct (Kruger et al., 2005).



Counterfactual thinking. When *The Price is Right* contestants give the wrong answer and lose out on a prize, they likely experience counterfactual thinking—imagining what might have been.
CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images

- Students who chose a college major, but then thought about the benefits of a major they didn't choose, were less satisfied with their choice and predicted they would not perform as well (Leach & Patall, 2013).
- The team or the political candidate who barely loses will simulate over and over how they could have won (Sanna et al., 2003).

Counterfactual thinking underlies our feelings of luck. When we have barely escaped a bad event—avoiding defeat with a last-minute goal or standing near a falling icicle—we easily imagine a negative counterfactual (losing, being hit) and therefore feel "good luck" (Teigen et al., 1999). "*Bad* luck" refers to bad events that did happen but easily might not have.

The more significant and unlikely the event, the more intense the counterfactual thinking (Roese & Hur, 1997). Bereaved people who have lost a spouse or a child in a vehicle accident, or a child to sudden infant death syndrome, commonly report replaying and undoing the event (Davis et al., 1995, 1996). One friend of mine [DM] survived a head-on collision with a drunk driver that killed his wife, daughter, and mother. "For months," he recalled, "I turned the events of that day over and over in my mind. I kept reliving the day, changing the order of events so that the accident wouldn't occur" (Sittser, 1994).

Most people, however, live with more regret over things they *didn't* do than what they did, such as, "I should have told my father I loved him before he died" or "I wish I had been more serious in college" (Gilovich & Medvec, 1994; Rajagopal et al., 2006). In one survey of adults, the most common regret was not taking their education more seriously (Kinnier & Metha, 1989). Would we live with less regret if we dared more often to reach beyond our comfort zone—to venture out, risking failure, but at least having tried?

People are more often apologetic about actions than inactions (Zeelenberg et al., 1998).

Illusory Thinking

Another influence on everyday thinking is our search for order in random events, a tendency that can lead us down all sorts of wrong paths.

ILLUSORY CORRELATION

It is easy to see a correlation where none exists. When we expect to find significant relationships, we easily associate random events, perceiving an **illusory correlation.** William Ward and Herbert Jenkins (1965) showed people the results of a hypothetical 50-day cloud-seeding experiment. They told participants which of the 50 days the clouds had been seeded and which days it rained. The information was nothing more than a random mix of results: Sometimes it rained after seeding; sometimes it didn't. Participants nevertheless became convinced—in conformity with their ideas about the effects of cloud seeding—that they really had observed a relationship between cloud seeding and rain.

illusory correlation
Perception of a relationship where none exists, or perception of a stronger relationship than actually exists.



The odds of winning are the same whether you choose the numbers or someone else does, but when they win, many people believe it was due to their "lucky numbers"—an example of illusory correlation.
Steve Allen/Brand X Pictures/JupiterImages

Other experiments confirm this illusory correlation phenomenon: *People easily misperceive random events as confirming their beliefs* (Crocker, 1981; Ratliff & Nosek, 2010; Trolier & Hamilton, 1986). If we believe a correlation exists, we are more likely to notice and recall confirming instances. If we believe that premonitions correlate with events, we notice and remember any joint occurrence of the premonition and the event's later occurrence. If we believe that overweight women are less happy, we perceive that we have witnessed such a correlation even when we have not (Viken et al., 2005). We ignore or forget all

the times unusual events do not coincide. If, after we think about a friend, the friend calls us, we notice and remember that coincidence. We don't notice all the times we think of a friend without any ensuing call, or receive a call from a friend about whom we've not been thinking.

GAMBLING. Compared with those given an assigned lottery number, people who chose their own number demanded four times as much money when asked if they would sell their ticket. When playing a game of chance against an awkward and nervous person, they bet significantly more than when playing against a dapper, confident opponent (Langer, 1977). Being the person who throws the dice or spins the wheel increases people's confidence (Wohl & Enzle, 2002). In these and other ways, dozens of experiments have consistently found people acting as if they can predict or control chance events (Stefan & David, 2013).

Observations of real-life gamblers confirm these experimental findings (Orgaz et al., 2013). Dice players may throw softly for low numbers and hard for high numbers (Henslin, 1967). The gambling industry thrives on gamblers' illusions. Gamblers attribute wins to their skill and foresight. Losses become "near misses" or "flukes," or for the sports gambler, a bad call by the referee or a freakish bounce of the ball (Gilovich & Douglas, 1986).

Stock traders also like the "feeling of empowerment" that comes from being able to choose and control their own stock trades, as if their being in control can enable them to outperform the market average. One ad declared that online investing "is about control." Alas, the illusion of control breeds overconfidence and frequent losses after stock market trading costs are subtracted (Barber & Odean, 2001a, 2001b).

People like feeling in control and so, when experiencing a lack of control, will act to create a sense of predictability. In experiments, loss of control has led people to form illusory correlations in stock market information, to perceive nonexistent conspiracies, and to develop superstitions (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008).

REGRESSION TOWARD THE AVERAGE. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) noted another way by which an illusion of control may arise: We fail to recognize the statistical phenomenon of **regression toward the average.** Because exam scores fluctuate partly by chance, most students who get extremely high scores on an exam will get lower scores on the next exam. If their first score is at the ceiling, their second score is more likely to fall back ("regress") toward their own average than to push the ceiling even higher. That is why a student who does consistently good work, even if never the best, will sometimes end a course at the top of the class. Conversely, students who earn low scores on the first

regression toward the average
The statistical tendency for extreme scores or extreme behavior to return toward one's average.



Regression to the average. When we are at an extremely low point, anything we try will often seem effective. "Maybe a yoga class will improve my life." Events seldom continue at an abnormal low.
Purestock/SuperStock

exam are likely to improve. If those who scored lowest go for tutoring after the first exam, the tutors are likely to feel effective when the student improves, even if the tutoring had no effect.

Indeed, when things reach a low point, we will try anything, and whatever we try—going to a psychotherapist, starting a new diet-exercise plan, reading a self-help book—is more likely to be followed by improvement than by further deterioration. Sometimes we recognize that events are not likely to continue at an unusually good or bad extreme. Experience has taught us that when everything is going great, something will go wrong, and that when life is dealing us terrible blows, we can usually look forward to things getting better. Often, though, we fail to recognize this regression effect. We puzzle at why baseball's rookie of the year often has a more ordinary second year—did he become overconfident? Self-conscious? We forget that exceptional performance tends to regress toward normality.

By simulating the consequences of using praise and punishment, Paul Schaffner (1985) showed how the illusion of control might infiltrate human relations. He invited Bowdoin College students to train an imaginary fourth-grade boy, "Harold," to come to school by 8:30 each morning. For each school day during a 3-week period, a computer displayed Harold's arrival time, which was always between 8:20 and 8:40. The students would then select a response to Harold, ranging from strong praise to strong reprimand. As you might expect, they usually praised Harold when he arrived before 8:30 and reprimanded him when he arrived after 8:30. Because Schaffner had programmed the computer to display a random sequence of arrival times, Harold's arrival time tended to improve (to regress toward 8:30) after he was reprimanded. For example, if Harold arrived at 8:39, he was almost sure to be reprimanded, and his randomly selected next-day arrival time was likely to be earlier than 8:39. Thus, *even though their reprimands were having no effect,* most students ended the experiment believing that their reprimands had been effective.

This experiment demonstrates Tversky and Kahneman's provocative conclusion: *Nature operates in such a way that we often feel punished for rewarding others and rewarded for punishing them.* In actuality, as you probably learned in introductory psychology, positive reinforcement for doing things right is usually more effective and has fewer negative side effects.

Moods and Judgments

Social judgment involves efficient information processing. It also involves our feelings: Our moods infuse our judgments. Unhappy people—especially the bereaved or depressed—tend to be more self-focused and brooding (Myers, 1993, 2000). But there is also a bright side to sadness (Forgas, 2013). A depressed mood motivates intense thinking—a search for information that makes one's environment more memorable, understandable, and controllable.

Happy people, by contrast, are more trusting, more loving, more responsive. If people are made temporarily happy by receiving a small gift while shopping, they will report, a few moments later on an unrelated survey, that their cars and TV sets are working beautifully—better, if you took their word for it, than those belonging to folks who replied after not receiving gifts.

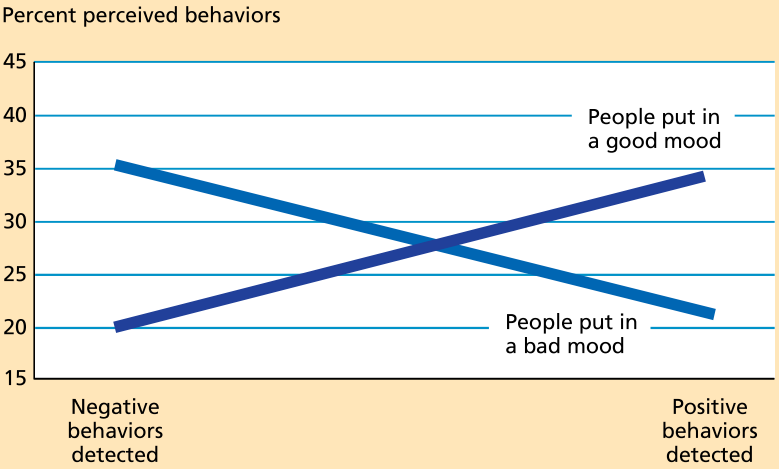
Moods pervade our thinking. From West Germans enjoying their team's World Cup soccer victory (Schwarz et al., 1987) to Australians emerging from a heartwarming movie (Forgas & Moylan, 1987), people seem good-hearted; life seems wonderful. When we are in a happy mood, the world seems friendlier, decisions are easier, and good news more readily comes to mind (DeSteno et al., 2000; Isen & Means, 1983; Stone & Glass, 1986).

Let a mood turn gloomy, however, and thoughts switch onto a different track. Off come the rose-colored glasses; on come the dark glasses. Now the bad mood primes our recollections of negative events (Bower, 1987; Johnson & Magaro, 1987). Our relationships seem to sour. Our self-images take a dive. Our hopes for the future dim. And other people's behavior seems more sinister (Brown & Taylor, 1986; Mayer & Salovey, 1987).

Joseph Forgas (1999, 2008, 2010, 2011) had often been struck by how people's "memories and judgments change with the color of their mood." Say you're put in a good or a

FIGURE :: 1

A temporary good or bad mood strongly influenced people's ratings of their videotaped behavior. Those in a bad mood detected far fewer positive behaviors.
Source: Forgas et al., 1984



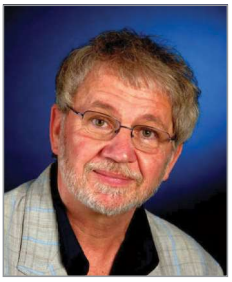
bad mood and then watch a recording (made the day before) of you talking with someone. If made to feel happy, you feel pleased with what you see, and you are able to detect many instances of your poise, interest, and social skill. If you've been put in a bad mood, viewing the same recording seems to reveal a quite different you—one who is stiff, nervous, and inarticulate (Forgas et al., 1984; Figure 1). Given how your mood colors your judgments, you feel relieved at how things brighten when the experimenter switches you to a happy mood before leaving the experiment. Curiously, note Michael Ross and Garth Fletcher (1985), we don't attribute our changing perceptions to our mood shifts. Rather, the world really seems different. (To read more about moods and memory, see "The Inside Story: Joseph P. Forgas: Can Bad Weather Improve Your Memory?")

Our moods color how we judge our worlds partly by bringing to mind past experiences associated with the mood. When we are in a bad mood, we have more depressing thoughts. Mood-related thoughts may distract us from complex thinking about something else. Thus, when emotionally aroused—when either angry or in a very good mood—we become more likely to make System 1 snap judgments and evaluate others based on stereotypes (Bodenhausen et al., 1994; Paulhus & Lim, 1994).

THE inside STORY

Joseph P. Forgas: Can Bad Weather Improve Your Memory?

I noticed some time ago that I not only get into a worse mood on cold, rainy days, but surprisingly, I also seem to remember more clearly the details of what happens on such days. Could it be that negative mood also influences how well we monitor our environment? Perhaps negative mood works like a mild alarm signal, alerting us to pay better attention to what is around us? I decided to examine this possibility in a natural experiment. We placed a number of small unusual trinkets around a Sydney suburban newsagency, and then checked how well departing customers could remember these objects when they leave the shop on cold, rainy days, or warm sunny days (Forgas, Goldenberg & Unkelbach, 2009). My hunch was confirmed: memory for objects in the shop was significantly better when customers were in a bad mood (on unpleasant days) than on pleasant sunny days. It seems that moods subconsciously influence how closely we observe the outside around us, with negative mood improving attention and memory.



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SUMMING UP: How Do We Judge Our Social Worlds?

- We have an enormous capacity for automatic, efficient, intuitive thinking *(System 1)*. Our cognitive efficiency, although generally adaptive, comes at the price of occasional error. Because we are generally unaware of those errors entering our thinking, it is useful to identify ways in which we form and sustain false beliefs.
- Our preconceptions strongly influence how we interpret and remember events. In a phenomenon called *priming,* people's prejudgments have striking effects on how they perceive and interpret information.
- We often overestimate our judgments. This *overconfidence phenomenon* stems partly from the much greater ease with which we can imagine why we might be right than why we might be wrong. Moreover, people are much more likely to search for information that can confirm their beliefs than for information that can disconfirm them.
- When given compelling anecdotes or even useless information, we often ignore useful base-rate information. This is partly due to the later ease of recall of vivid information (the *availability heuristic*).
- We are often swayed by illusions of correlation and personal control. It is tempting to perceive correlations where none exist *(illusory correlation)* and to think we can predict or control chance events (the *illusion of control*).
- Moods infuse judgments. Good and bad moods trigger memories of experiences associated with those moods. Moods color our interpretations of current experiences. And by distracting us, moods can also influence how deeply or superficially we think when making judgments.

HOW DO WE PERCEIVE OUR SOCIAL WORLDS?

Understand how our assumptions and prejudgments guide our perceptions, interpretations, and recall.

Our preconceptions guide how we perceive and interpret information. We construe the world through belief-tinted glasses. "Sure, preconceptions matter," people agree; yet they fail to fully appreciate the impact of their own predispositions.

Let's consider some provocative experiments. The first group examines how predispositions and prejudgments affect how we perceive and interpret information. The second group plants a judgment in people's minds *after* they have been given information to see how after-the-fact ideas bias recall. The overarching point: *We respond not to reality as it is but to reality as we construe it.*

Perceiving and Interpreting Events

Despite some startling biases and logical flaws in how we perceive and understand one another, we're mostly accurate (Jussim, 2012). Our first impressions of one another are more often right than wrong. Moreover, the better we know people, the more accurately we can read their minds and feelings.

But on occasion, our prejudgments err. The effects of prejudgments and expectations are standard fare for psychology's introductory course. Consider this phrase:

A
BIRD
IN THE
THE HAND

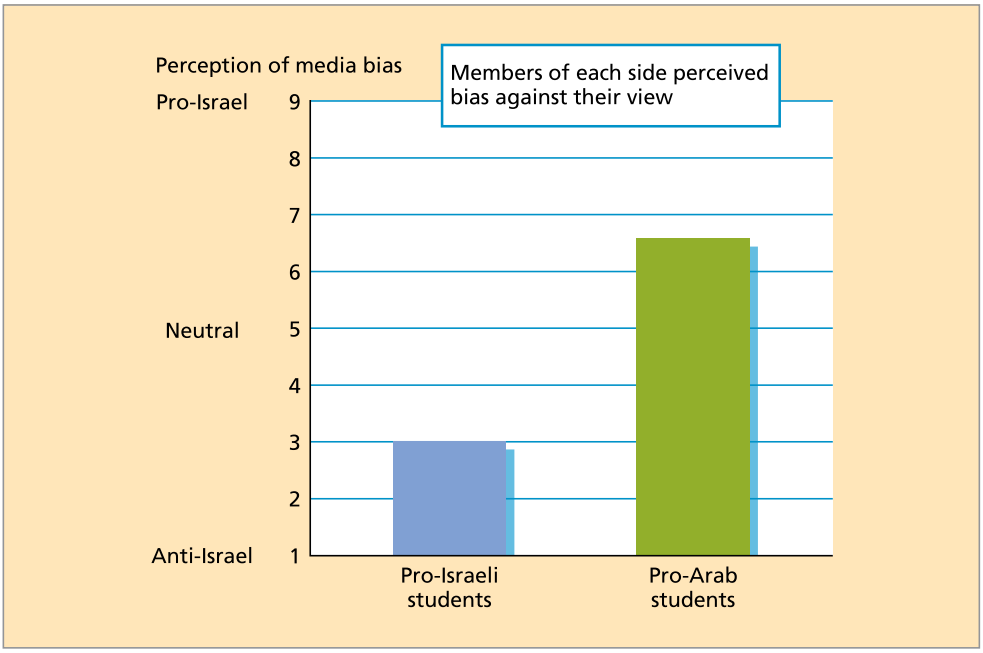
Did you notice anything wrong with it? There is more to perception than meets the eye*.

POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS. The same is true of political perception. Because political perceptions are very much in the eye of the beholder, even a simple stimulus may

* The word "the" appears twice.

FIGURE :: 2

Pro-Israeli and pro-Arab students who viewed network news descriptions of the "Beirut massacre" believed the coverage was biased against their point of view.
Source: Data from Vallone et al., 1985.



"Once you have a belief, it influences how you perceive all other relevant information. Once you see a country as hostile, you are likely to interpret ambiguous actions on their part as signifying their hostility."

—Political Scientist Robert Jervis (1985)

strike two people quite differently. An experiment by Robert Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper (1985) revealed just how powerful preconceptions can be. They showed pro-Israeli and pro-Arab students six network news segments describing the killing of civilian refugees at two camps in Beirut, Lebanon. As Figure 2 illustrates, each group perceived the networks as hostile to its side.

The phenomenon is commonplace: Sports fans perceive referees as partial to the other side. Political candidates and their supporters nearly always view the news media as unsympathetic to their cause (Richardson et al., 2008).

It's not just fans and politicians. People everywhere perceive mediators and media as biased against their position. "There is no subject about which people are less objective than objectivity," noted one media commentator (Poniewozik, 2003). Indeed, people's perceptions of bias can be used to assess their attitudes (Saucier & Miller, 2003). Tell me where you see bias, and you will signal your attitudes.



Some circumstances make it difficult to be unbiased.
© Alex Gregory/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

Is that why, in politics, religion, and science, ambiguous information often fuels conflict? Presidential debates in the United States have mostly reinforced predebate opinions. By nearly a 10-to-1 margin, those who already favored one candidate or the other perceived their candidate as having won (Kinder & Sears, 1985). Thus, report Geoffrey Munro and colleagues (1997), people on both sides may become even more supportive of their respective candidates after viewing a presidential debate.

The bottom line: We view our social worlds through the spectacles of our beliefs, attitudes, and values. That is one reason our beliefs are so important; they shape our interpretation of everything else.

Belief Perseverance

Imagine a babysitter who decides, during an evening with a crying infant, that bottle feeding produces colicky babies: "Come to think of it, cow's milk obviously suits calves better than babies." If the infant turns out to be suffering a high fever, will the sitter nevertheless persist in believing that bottle feeding causes colic (Ross & Anderson, 1982)? To find out, Lee Ross, Craig Anderson, and colleagues planted a falsehood in people's minds and then tried to discredit it.



Partisan perceptions. Supporters of a particular candidate or cause tend to see the media as favoring the other side.
John Moore/Getty Images

Their research reveals that it is surprisingly difficult to demolish a falsehood after the person conjures up a rationale for it. Each experiment first *implanted a belief,* either by proclaiming it to be true or by showing the participants some anecdotal evidence. Then the participants were asked to *explain why* it is true. Finally, the researchers totally *discredited* the initial information by telling the participants the truth: The information was manufactured for the experiment, and half the participants in the experiment had received opposite information. Nevertheless, the false belief survived approximately 75 percent intact, presumably because the participants still retained their invented explanations for the belief. This phenomenon, called **belief perseverance,** shows that beliefs can grow their own legs and survive discrediting.

belief perseverance
Persistence of one's initial conceptions, such as when the basis for one's belief is discredited but an explanation of why the belief might be true survives.

Another example: Anderson, Lepper, and Ross (1980) asked participants to decide whether individuals who take risks make good or bad firefighters. One group considered a risk-prone person who was a successful firefighter and a cautious person who was unsuccessful. The other group considered cases suggesting the opposite conclusion. After forming their theory that risk-prone people make better (or worse) firefighters, the participants wrote explanations for it—for example, that risk-prone people are brave or that cautious people have fewer accidents. After each explanation was formed, it could exist independently of the information that initially created the belief. When that information was discredited, the participants nevertheless held to their self-generated explanations and therefore continued to believe that risk-prone people really do make better (or worse) firefighters.

These experiments suggest that the more we examine our theories and explain how they *might* be true, the more closed we become to information that challenges our beliefs. When we consider why an accused person might be guilty, why an offending stranger acts that way, or why a favored stock might rise in value, our explanations may survive challenges (Davies, 1997; Jelalian & Miller, 1984).

"We hear and apprehend only what we already half know."
—Henry David Thoreau, 1817–1862

The evidence is compelling: Our beliefs and expectations powerfully affect how we mentally construct events. Usually, we benefit from our preconceptions, just as scientists benefit from creating theories that guide them in noticing and interpreting events. But the benefits sometimes entail a cost: We become prisoners of our own thought patterns. Thus, the supposed Martian "canals" that twentieth-century astronomers delighted in spotting turned out to be the product of intelligent life—an intelligence on Earth's side of the telescope.

Constructing Memories of Ourselves and Our Worlds

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

> Memory can be likened to a storage chest in the brain into which we deposit material and from which we can withdraw it later if needed. Occasionally, something is lost from the "chest," and then we say we have forgotten.

In one survey, 85 percent of college students agreed (Lamal, 1979). As one magazine ad put it, "Science has proven the accumulated experience of a lifetime is preserved perfectly in your mind."

"Memory isn't like reading a book: It's more like writing a book from fragmentary notes."
—John F. Kihlstrom (1994)

Actually, psychological research has proved the opposite. Our memories are not exact copies of experiences that remain on deposit in a memory bank. Rather, we construct memories at the time of withdrawal. Like a paleontologist inferring the appearance of a dinosaur from bone fragments, we reconstruct our distant past by using our current feelings and expectations to combine information fragments. Thus, we can easily (although unconsciously) revise our memories to suit our current knowledge. When one of my [DM] sons complained, "The June issue of *Cricket* never came," and was then shown where it was, he delightedly responded, "Oh good, I knew I'd gotten it."

When an experimenter or a therapist manipulates people's presumptions about their past, many people will construct false memories. Asked to imagine that, as a child, they knocked over a punch bowl at a wedding, about one-fourth will later recall the fictitious event as something that actually happened (Loftus & Bernstein, 2005). In its search for truth, the mind sometimes constructs a falsehood.

In experiments involving more than 20,000 people, Elizabeth Loftus (2003, 2007, 2011a) and collaborators have explored the mind's tendency to construct memories. In the typical experiment, people witness an event, receive misleading information about it (or not), and then take a memory test. The results find a **misinformation effect** in which people incorporate the misinformation into their memories. They recall a yield sign as a stop sign, hammers as screwdrivers, *Vogue* magazine as *Mademoiselle,* Dr. Henderson as "Dr. Davidson," breakfast cereal as eggs, and a clean-shaven man as a fellow with a mustache. Suggested misinformation may even produce false memories of supposed child sexual abuse, argues Loftus.

misinformation effect
Incorporating "misinformation" into one's memory of the event, after witnessing an event and receiving misleading information about it.

This process affects our recall of social as well as physical events. Jack Croxton and colleagues (1984) had students spend 15 minutes talking with someone. Those who were later informed that this person liked them recalled the person's behavior as relaxed, comfortable, and happy. Those who heard the person disliked them recalled the person as nervous, uncomfortable, and not so happy.

RECONSTRUCTING OUR PAST ATTITUDES

Five years ago, how did you feel about nuclear power? About your country's president or prime minister? About your parents? If your attitudes have changed, how much have they changed?

"A man should never be ashamed to own that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday."
—Jonathan Swift, *Thoughts on Various Subjects,* 1711

Experimenters have explored such questions, and the results have been unnerving. People whose attitudes have changed often insist that they have always felt much as they now feel. Carnegie Mellon University students answered a long survey that included a question about student control over the university curriculum. A week later, they agreed to write an essay opposing student control. After doing so, their attitudes shifted toward greater opposition to student control. When asked to recall how they had answered the question before writing the essay, the students "remembered" holding the opinion that they *now* held and denied that the experiment had affected them (Bem & McConnell, 1970).

After observing students similarly denying their former attitudes, researchers D. R. Wixon and James Laird (1976) commented, "The speed, magnitude, and certainty" with which the students revised their own histories "was striking." As George Vaillant (1977) noted after following adults through time, "It is all too common for caterpillars to become butterflies and then to maintain that in their youth they had been little butterflies. Maturation makes liars of us all."

The construction of positive memories brightens our recollections. Terence Mitchell, Leigh Thompson, and colleagues (1994, 1997) report that people often exhibit *rosy retrospection*—they recall mildly pleasant events more favorably than they experienced them. College students on a 3-week bike trip, older adults on a guided tour of Austria, and undergraduates on vacation all reported enjoying their experiences as they were having them. But they later recalled such experiences even more fondly, minimizing the unpleasant or boring aspects and remembering the high points. Thus, the pleasant times during which I [DM] have sojourned in Scotland, I now (back in my office, facing deadlines and interruptions) romanticize as pure bliss. The drizzle and the pesky midge bugs are but dim memories. The spectacular scenery and the fresh sea air and the favorite tea rooms are

still with me. With any positive experience, some of our pleasure resides in the anticipation, some in the actual experience, and some in the rosy retrospection.

"Travel is glamorous only in retrospect."

—Paul Theroux, in *The Observer*

Cathy McFarland and Michael Ross (1985) found that as our relationships change, we also revise our recollections of other people. They had university students rate their steady dating partners. Two months later, they rated them again. Students who were more in love than ever had a tendency to overestimate their first impressions—it was "love at first sight." Those who had broken up were more likely to *underestimate* their earlier liking—recalling their ex as somewhat selfish and bad-tempered.

Diane Holmberg and John Holmes (1994) discovered the phenomenon also operating among 373 newlywed couples, most of whom reported being very happy. When resurveyed 2 years later, those whose marriages had soured recalled that things had always been bad. The results are "frightening," said Holmberg and Holmes: "Such biases can lead to a dangerous downward spiral. The worse your current view of your partner is, the worse your memories are, which only further confirms your negative attitudes."

It's not that we are totally unaware of how we used to feel, but when memories are hazy, current feelings guide our recall. When widows and widowers try to recall the grief they felt on their spouse's death 5 years earlier, their current emotional state colors their memories (Safer et al., 2001). When patients recall their previous day's headache pain, their current feelings sway their recollections (Eich et al., 1985). Depressed people who get Botox—which prevents them from frowning—recover from depression more quickly, perhaps because they find it more difficult to remember why they were sad (Lewis & Bowler, 2009).

RECONSTRUCTING OUR PAST BEHAVIOR

Memory construction enables us to revise our own histories. In one study, University of Waterloo students read a message about the benefits of toothbrushing. Later, in a supposedly different experiment, these students recalled brushing their teeth more often during the preceding 2 weeks than did students who had not heard the message (Ross et al., 1981). Likewise, judging from surveys, people report smoking many fewer cigarettes than are actually sold (Hall, 1985). And they recall casting more votes than were actually recorded (Bureau of the Census, 2012).

"Vanity plays lurid tricks with our memory."

—Novelist Joseph Conrad, 1857–1924

Social psychologist Anthony Greenwald (1980) noted the similarity of such findings in George Orwell's novel *1984*—in which it was "necessary to remember that events happened in the desired manner." Indeed, argued Greenwald, we all have "totalitarian egos" that revise the past to suit our present views. Thus, we underreport bad behavior and overreport good behavior.

Sometimes our present view is that we've improved—in which case we may misrecall our past as more unlike the present than it actually was. This tendency resolves a puzzling pair of consistent findings: Those who participate in psychotherapy and self-improvement programs for weight control, antismoking, and exercise show only modest improvement on average. Yet they often claim considerable benefit. Michael Conway and Michael Ross (1986) explain why: Having expended so much time, effort, and money on self-improvement, people may think, "I may not be perfect now, but I was worse before; this did me a lot of good."

Our social judgments are a mix of observation and expectation, reason and passion.

SUMMING UP: How Do We Perceive Our Social Worlds?

- Other experiments have planted judgments or false ideas in people's minds *after* they have been given information. These experiments reveal that as *before-the-fact judgments* bias our perceptions and interpretations, so *after-the-fact judgments* bias our recall.
- *Belief perseverance* is the phenomenon in which people cling to their initial beliefs and the reasons why a belief might be true, even when the basis for the belief is discredited.
- Far from being a repository for facts about the past, our memories are actually formed when we retrieve them, and they are subject to strong influence by the attitudes and feelings we hold at the time of retrieval.

HOW DO WE EXPLAIN OUR SOCIAL WORLDS?

Recognize how—and how accurately—we explain others' behavior.

People make it their business to explain other people, and social psychologists make it their business to explain people's explanations.

Our judgments of people depend on how we explain their behavior. Depending on our explanation, we may judge killing as murder, manslaughter, self-defense, or heroism. Depending on our explanation, we may view a homeless person as lacking initiative or as victimized by job and welfare cutbacks. Depending on our explanation, we may interpret someone's friendly behavior as genuine warmth or as ingratiation. Attribution theory helps us make sense of how such explanations work.

Attributing Causality: To the Person or the Situation

We endlessly analyze and discuss why things happen as they do, especially when we experience something negative or unexpected (Weiner, 1985, 2008, 2010). If worker productivity declines, do we assume the workers are getting lazier? Or has their workplace become less efficient? Does a young boy who hits his classmates have a hostile personality? Or is he responding to relentless teasing? Researchers found that married people often analyze their partners' behaviors, especially their negative behaviors. Cold hostility, more than a warm hug, is likely to leave the partner wondering "Why?" (Holtzworth & Jacobson, 1988).

Spouses' answers correlate with marital satisfaction. Unhappy couples usually offer internal explanations for negative acts ("She was late because she doesn't care about me"). Happy couples more often externalize ("She was late because of heavy traffic"). Explanations for positive acts similarly work either to maintain distress ("He brought me flowers because he wants sex") or to enhance the relationship ("He brought me flowers to show he loves me") (Hewstone & Fincham, 1996; McNulty et al., 2008; Weiner, 1995).

misattribution
Mistakenly attributing a behavior to the wrong source.

Antonia Abbey and colleagues (1987, 1991, 2011) have repeatedly found that men are more likely than women to attribute a woman's friendliness to sexual interest. Men's misreading of women's warmth as a sexual come-on—an example of **misattribution**—can contribute to sexual harassment or even rape (Farris et al., 2008; Kolivas & Gross, 2007; Pryor et al., 1997). Many men believe women are flattered by repeated requests for dates, which women more often view as harassment (Rotundo et al., 2001).



A misattribution? Date rape sometimes begins with a man's misreading a woman's warmth as a sexual come-on.
Image Source/Alamy

Misattribution is particularly likely when men are in positions of power. A manager may misinterpret a subordinate woman's submissive or friendly behavior and, full of himself, see her in sexual terms (Bargh & Raymond, 1995). Men think about sex more often than do women. Men also are more likely than women to assume that others share their feelings. Thus, a man with sex on his mind may greatly overestimate the sexual significance of a woman's courtesy smile (Levesque et al., 2006; Nelson & LeBoeuf, 2002).

Such misattributions help explain the greater sexual assertiveness exhibited by men throughout the world, and the greater tendency of men in various cultures, from Boston to Bombay, to justify rape by arguing that the victim consented or implied consent (Kanekar & Nazareth, 1988; Muehlenhard, 1988; Shotland, 1989). Misattributions also help explain why, in one national survey, 23 percent of American women said they had been forced into unwanted sexual behavior, but only 3 percent of American men said they had ever forced a woman into a sexual act (Laumann et al., 1994).

Attribution theory analyzes how we explain people's behavior and what we infer from it. The variations of attribution theory share some common assumptions. Each, as Daniel Gilbert and Patrick Malone (1995) explain, "construes the human skin as a special boundary that separates one set of 'causal forces' from another. On the sunny side of the epidermis are the external or situational forces that press inward upon the person, and on the meaty side are the internal or personal forces that exert pressure outward. Sometimes these forces press in conjunction, sometimes in opposition, and their dynamic interplay manifests itself as observable behavior."

attribution theory
The theory of how people explain others' behavior—for example, by attributing it either to internal dispositions (enduring traits, motives, and attitudes) or to external situations.

Attribution theory pioneer Fritz Heider (1958) and others after him analyzed the "commonsense psychology" of how people explain everyday events. They concluded that when we observe someone acting intentionally, we sometimes attribute that person's behavior to *internal* causes (for example, the person's disposition or mental state) and sometimes to *external* causes (for example, something about the person's situation). A teacher may wonder whether a child's underachievement is due to lack of motivation and ability (a **dispositional attribution**) or to physical and social circumstances (a **situational attribution**). Also, some of us are more inclined to attribute behavior to stable personality; others tend more to attribute behavior to situations (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Robins et al., 2004).

dispositional attribution
Attributing behavior to the person's disposition and traits.

situational attribution
Attributing behavior to the environment.

INFERRING TRAITS

We often infer that other people's actions are indicative of their intentions and dispositions (Jones & Davis, 1965). If we observe Rick making a sarcastic comment to Linda, we infer that Rick is a hostile person. When are people more likely to infer that others' behavior is caused by traits? For one thing, behavior that's normal for a particular situation tells us less about the person than does behavior unusual for that situation. If Samantha is sarcastic in a job interview, a situation in which sarcasm is rare, that tells us more about Samantha than if she is sarcastic with her siblings.

The ease with which we infer traits—a phenomenon called **spontaneous trait inference**—is remarkable. In experiments at New York University, James Uleman (1989; Uleman et al., 2008) gave students statements to remember, such as "The librarian carries the old woman's groceries across the street." The students would instantly, unintentionally, and unconsciously

spontaneous trait inference
An effortless, automatic inference of a trait after exposure to someone's behavior.



To what should we attribute a student's sleepiness? To lack of sleep? To boredom? Whether we make internal or external attributions depends on whether we notice her consistently sleeping in this and other classes, and on whether other students react as she does to this particular class.
Moodboard/Corbis

An exception: Asians are less likely to attribute people's behavior to their personality traits (Na & Kitayama, 2011).

infer a trait. When later they were helped to recall the sentence, the most valuable clue word was not "books" (to cue librarian) or "bags" (to cue groceries) but "helpful"—the inferred trait that we suspect you, too, spontaneously attributed to the librarian. Just 1/10th of a second exposure to someone's face leads people to spontaneously infer some personality traits (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

The Fundamental Attribution Error

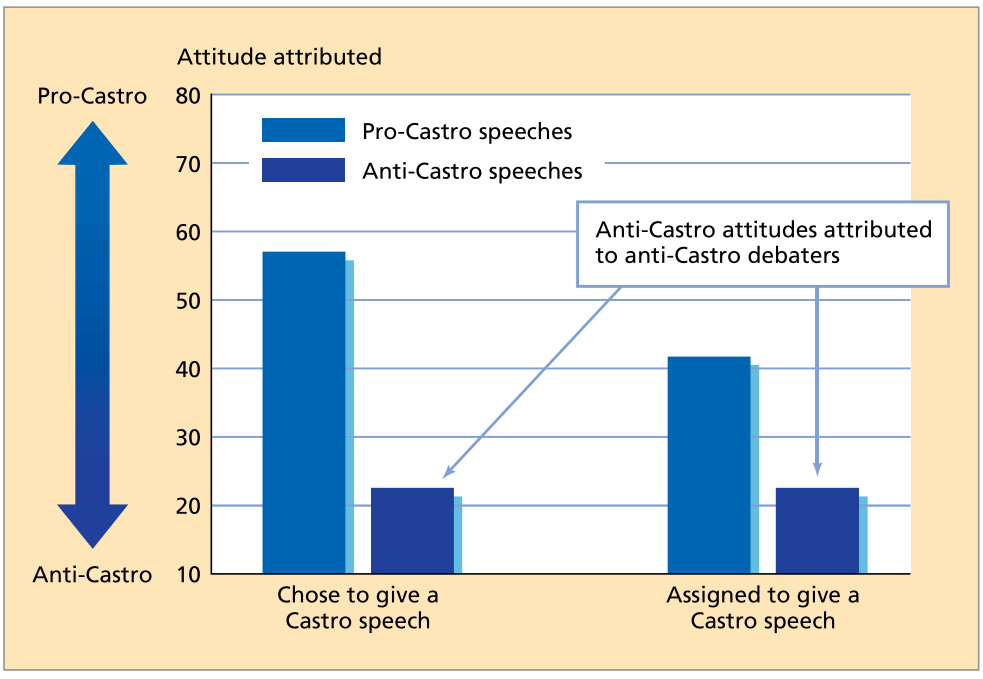
Social psychology's most important lesson concerns the influence of our social environment. At any moment, our internal state, and therefore what we say and do, depends on the situation as well as on what we bring to the situation. In experiments, a slight difference between two situations sometimes greatly affects how people respond. As a professor, I [DM] have seen this when teaching the same class at both 8:30 A.M. and 7:00 P.M. Silent stares would greet me at 8:30; at 7:00, I had to break up a party. In each situation, some individuals were more talkative than others, but the difference between the two situations exceeded the individual differences.

Attribution researchers have found a common problem with our attributions. When explaining someone's behavior, we often underestimate the impact of the situation and overestimate the extent to which it reflects the individual's traits and attitudes. Thus, even knowing the effect of the time of day on classroom conversation, I found it terribly tempting to assume that the people in the 7:00 P.M. class were more extraverted than the "silent types" who came at 8:30 A.M. Likewise, we may infer that people fall because they're clumsy rather than because they were tripped; that people smile because they're happy rather than faking friendliness, and that people speed past us on the highway because they're aggressive rather than late for an important meeting.

fundamental attribution error
The tendency for observers to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences upon others' behavior.

This discounting of the situation, called the **fundamental attribution error** (Ross, 1977), appears in many experiments. In the first such study, Edward Jones and Victor Harris (1967) had Duke University students read debaters' speeches supporting or attacking Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro. When told that the debater chose which position to take, the students logically assumed it reflected the person's own attitude. But what happened when the students were told that the debate coach had assigned the position? Students still inferred that the debater had the assigned leanings (Figure 3). People seemed to think, "Yeah, I know he was assigned that position, but, you know, I think he really believes it."

FIGURE :: 3
The Fundamental Attribution Error
When people read a debate speech supporting or attacking Fidel Castro, they attributed corresponding attitudes to the speechwriter, even when the debate coach assigned the writer's position.
Source: Data from Jones & Harris (1967).



Even when people know they are *causing* someone else's behavior, they still underestimate external influences. If individuals dictate an opinion that someone else must then express, they still tend to see the person as actually holding that opinion (Gilbert & Jones, 1986). If people are asked to be either self-enhancing or self-deprecating during an interview, they are very aware of why they are acting so. But they are *un*aware of their effect on another person. If Juan acts modestly, his conversation partner Ethan is likely to exhibit modesty as well. Juan will easily understand his own behavior, but he will think that poor Ethan suffers from low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1988). In short, we tend to presume that others are the way they act—even when we don't make the same presumption about ourselves. Observing Cinderella cowering in her oppressive home, people (ignoring the situation) infer that she is meek; dancing with her at the ball, the prince sees a suave and glamorous person. Cinderella knows she is the same person in both situations.



When viewing a movie actor playing a "hero" or "villain" role, we find it difficult to escape the illusion that the scripted behavior reflects an inner disposition. Glenn Close, who has played villainous characters from the bunny-killing woman in *Fatal Attraction* to the unethical lawyer in the recent TV show *Damages*, is, in real life, a caring activist who co-founded a nonprofit to raise awareness of mental illness.
Desiree Navarro/Getty Images

One experiment re-created Lee Ross's firsthand experience of moving from graduate student to professor. His doctoral oral exam had proved a humbling experience as his apparently brilliant professors quizzed him on topics they specialized in. Six months later, *Dr.* Ross was himself an examiner, now able to ask penetrating questions on *his* favorite topics. Ross's hapless student later confessed to feeling exactly as Ross had a half-year before—dissatisfied with his ignorance and impressed with the apparent brilliance of the examiners.

In an experiment mimicking his student-to-professor experience, Ross set up a simulated quiz game. He randomly assigned some Stanford University students to play the role of questioner, some to play the role of contestant, and others to observe. The researchers invited the questioners to make up difficult questions that would demonstrate their wealth of knowledge. Any one of us can imagine such questions using one's own domain of competence: "Where is Bainbridge Island?" "How did Mary, Queen of Scots, die?" "Which has the longer coastline, Europe or Africa?" If even those few questions have you feeling a little uninformed, then you will appreciate the results of this experiment (Ross et al., 1977).*

Everyone had to know that the questioners would have the advantage. Yet both contestants and observers (but not the questioners) came to the erroneous conclusion that the questioners *really were* more knowledgeable than the contestants (Figure 4). Follow-up research shows that these misimpressions are hardly a reflection of low social intelligence. If anything, college students and other intelligent and socially competent people are *more* likely to make the attribution error (Bauman & Skitka, 2010; Block & Funder, 1986).

In real life, those with social power usually initiate and control conversations, which often leads underlings to overestimate their knowledge and intelligence. Medical doctors, for example, are often presumed to be experts on all sorts of questions unrelated to medicine. Similarly, students often overestimate the brilliance of their teachers. (As in the experiment, teachers are questioners on subjects of their special expertise.) When some of these students later become teachers, they are often amazed to discover that teachers are not so brilliant after all.

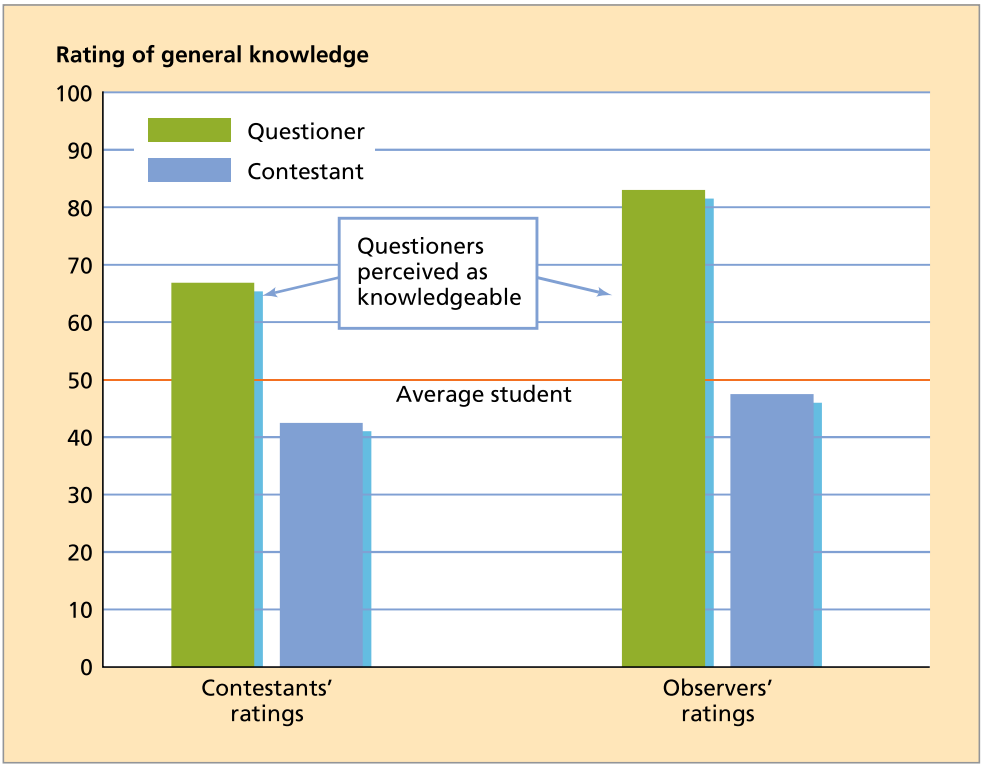
To illustrate the fundamental attribution error, most of us need to look no further than our own experiences. Determined to make some new friends, Nicole plasters a smile on her face and anxiously plunges into a party. Everyone else seems quite relaxed and happy

* Bainbridge Island is across Puget Sound from Seattle. Mary was ordered beheaded by her cousin Queen Elizabeth I. Although the African continent is more than double the area of Europe, Europe's coastline is longer. (It is more convoluted, with many harbors and inlets, a geographical fact that contributed to its role in the history of maritime trade.)

FIGURE :: 4

Both contestants and observers of a simulated quiz game assumed that a person who had been randomly assigned the role of questioner was far more knowledgeable than the contestant. Actually, the assigned roles of questioner and contestant simply made the questioner seem more knowledgeable. The failure to appreciate this illustrates the fundamental attribution error.

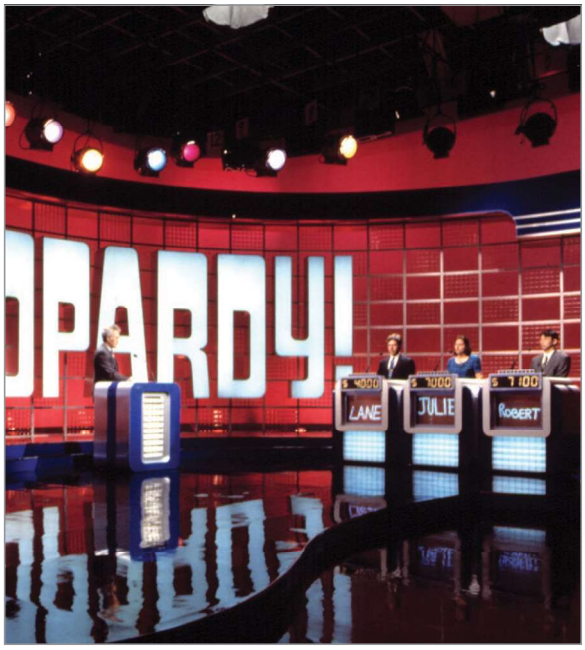
Source: Data from Ross et al., 1977.



as they laugh and talk with one another. Nicole wonders to herself, "Why is everyone always so at ease in groups like this while I'm feeling shy and tense?" Actually, everyone else is feeling nervous, too, and making the same attribution error in assuming that Nicole and the others *are* as they *appear*—confidently convivial.

WHY DO WE MAKE THE ATTRIBUTION ERROR?

So far, we have seen a bias in the way we explain other people's behavior: We often ignore powerful situational determinants. Why do we tend to underestimate the situational determinants of others' behavior but not of our own?



People often attribute keen intelligence to those, such as teachers and quiz show hosts, who test others' knowledge.
Everett Collection

PERSPECTIVE AND SITUATIONAL AWARENESS. Attribution theorists have pointed out that we observe others from a different perspective than we observe ourselves (Jones, 1976; Jones & Nisbett, 1971). When we act, the *environment* commands our attention. When we watch another *person* act, that *person* occupies the center of our attention and the environment becomes relatively invisible. If I'm mad, it's the situation that's making me angry. But someone else getting mad may seem like an ill-tempered person.

From his analysis of 173 studies, Bertram Malle (2006) concluded that the actor–observer difference is often minimal. When our action feels intentional and admirable, we attribute it to our own good reasons, not to the situation. It's only when we behave badly that we tend to display our disposition and attribute our behavior to the situation. Meanwhile, someone observing us may spontaneously infer a trait.

When people viewed a videotape of a suspect confessing during a police interview with a camera focused on the suspect, they perceived the confession as genuine. If the camera was instead focused on the detective, they perceived it as more coerced



The fundamental attribution error: observers underestimating the situation. Driving into a gas station, we may think the person parked at the second pump (blocking access to the first) is inconsiderate. That person, having arrived when the first pump was in use, attributes her behavior to the situation.
Courtesy Kathryn Brownson

(Lassiter & Irvine, 1986; Lassiter et al., 2005, 2007). The camera perspective influenced people's guilt judgments even when the judge instructed them not to allow this to happen (Lassiter et al., 2002).

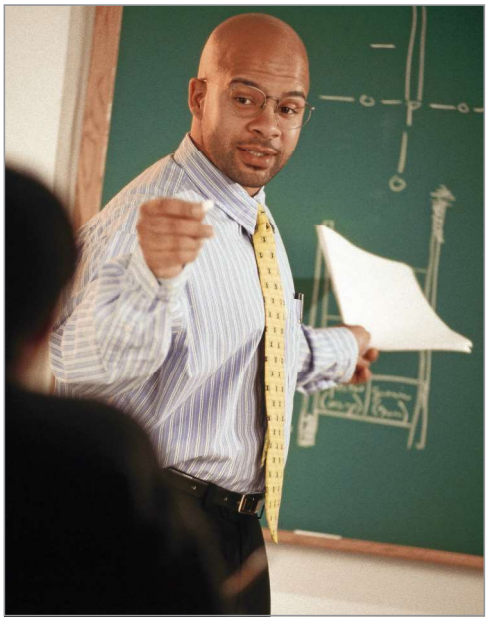
In courtrooms, most confession videotapes focus on the confessor. As we might expect, noted Daniel Lassiter and Kimberly Dudley (1991), such tapes yield a nearly 100 percent conviction rate when played by prosecutors. Aware of Lassiter's research on the *camera perspective bias*, New Zealand and some parts of Canada and the United States now require that police interrogations be filmed with equal focus on the officer and the suspect.

The passage of time decreases the tendency toward the fundamental attribution error. A week after hearing someone argue a position they did not choose, people were more likely to credit the situation (Burger & Palmer, 1991). The day after a presidential election, Jerry Burger and Julie Pavelich (1994) asked voters why the election turned out as it did. Most attributed the outcome to the candidates' personal traits and positions. When they asked other voters the same question a year later, only a third attributed the verdict to the candidates. More people now credited circumstances, such as the country's good mood and the robust economy.

Consider this: Are you generally quiet, talkative, or does it depend on the situation?

"Depends on the situation" is a common answer. Likewise, when asked to predict their feelings 2 weeks after receiving grades or learning the outcome of their country's national election, people expect the situation to rule their emotions; they underestimate the importance of their own sunny or dour dispositions (Quoidbach & Dunn, 2010). But when asked to describe a friend—or to describe what they were like 5 years ago—people more often ascribe trait descriptions. *When recalling our past, we become like observers of someone else* (Pronin & Ross, 2006). For most of us, the "old you" is someone other than today's "real you." We regard our distant past selves (and our distant future selves) almost as if they were other people occupying our body.

All these experiments point to a reason for the attribution error: *We find causes where we look for them.* To see this in your own experience, consider this: Would you say your social psychology instructor is a quiet or a talkative person?



Focusing on the person. Would you infer that your professor for this course, or the professor shown here, is naturally outgoing?
Comstock Images/JupiterImages RF

"And in imagination he began to recall the best moments of his pleasant life. . . . But the child who had experienced that happiness existed no longer, it was like a reminiscence of somebody else."

—Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 1886

You may have guessed that he or she is fairly outgoing. But consider: Your attention focuses on your instructor while he or she behaves in a public context that demands speaking. The instructor also observes his or her own behavior in many situations—in the classroom, in meetings, at home. "Me, talkative?" your instructor might say. "Well, it all depends on the situation. When I'm in class or with good friends, I'm rather outgoing. But at conferences and in unfamiliar situations I'm rather shy." Because we are acutely aware of how our behavior varies with the situation, we see ourselves as more variable than do other people (Baxter & Goldberg, 1987; Kammer, 1982; Sande et al., 1988). We think, "Nigel is uptight, but Fiona is relaxed. With me it varies."

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES. Cultures also influence attribution error (Ickes, 1980; Watson, 1982). An individualistic Western worldview predisposes people to assume that people, not situations, cause events. Internal explanations are more socially approved (Jellison & Green, 1981). "You can do it!" we are assured by the pop psychology of positive-thinking Western culture. You get what you deserve and deserve what you get.

Under alcohol's influence, people's attentional focus narrows and they become more likely to attribute someone's action—perhaps a bump at a bar—to intentionality (Begue et al., 2010). Thinking that a jolt or seeming insult was intentional may then trigger an aggravated reaction.

As Western children grow up, they learn to explain other people's behavior in terms of their personal characteristics (Rholes et al., 1990; Ross, 1981). As a first-grader, one of my [DM] sons unscrambled the words "gate the sleeve caught Tom on his" into "The gate caught Tom on his sleeve." His teacher, applying Western cultural assumptions, marked that wrong. The "right" answer located the cause within Tom: "Tom caught his sleeve on the gate."

The fundamental attribution error occurs across varied cultures (Krull et al., 1999). Yet people in Eastern Asian cultures are somewhat more sensitive than Westerners to the importance of situations. Thus, when aware of the social context, they are less inclined to assume that others' behavior corresponds to their traits (Choi et al., 1999; Farwell & Weiner, 2000; Masuda & Kitayama, 2004).

Some languages promote external attributions. Instead of "I was late," Spanish idiom allows one to say, "The clock caused me to be late." In collectivistic cultures, people less often perceive others in terms of personal dispositions (Lee et al., 1996; Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1988). They are less likely to spontaneously interpret a behavior as reflecting an inner trait (Newman, 1993). When told of someone's actions, Hindus in India are less likely than Americans to offer dispositional explanations ("She is kind") and more likely to offer situational explanations ("Her friends were with her") (Miller, 1984).

The fundamental attribution error is *fundamental* because it colors our explanations in basic and important ways. Researchers in Britain, India, Australia, and the United States have found that people's attributions predict their attitudes toward the poor and the unemployed (Furnham, 1982; Pandey et al., 1982; Skitka, 1999; Wagstaff, 1983; Weiner et al., 2011). Those who attribute poverty and unemployment to personal dispositions ("They're just lazy and undeserving") tend to adopt political positions unsympathetic to such people (Figure 5). This *dispositional attribution* ascribes behavior to the person's disposition and traits. Those who make *situational attributions* ("If you or I were to live with the same overcrowding, poor education, and discrimination, would we be any better off?") tend to adopt political positions that offer more direct support to the poor. Tell me your attributions for poverty and I will guess your politics.

Whether conservatives or liberals offer more situational attributions depends on the topic. When explaining poverty, liberals offer stronger situational attributions. When explaining U.S. Marines' killing of Iraqi civilians, conservatives offer stronger situational attributions (Morgan et al., 2010).

Can we benefit from being aware of the attribution error? I [DM] once assisted with some interviews for a faculty position. One candidate was interviewed by six of us at once; each of us had the opportunity to ask two or three questions. I came away thinking, "What a stiff, awkward person he is." The second candidate I met privately over coffee, and we immediately discovered we had a close, mutual friend. As we talked, I became increasingly impressed by what a "warm, engaging, stimulating person she is." Only later did I remember the fundamental attribution error and reassess my analysis. I had attributed his stiffness and her warmth to their dispositions; in fact, I later realized, such behavior resulted partly from the difference in their interview situations.

WHY WE STUDY ATTRIBUTION ERRORS

This chapter, like the one before it, explains some foibles and fallacies in our social thinking. Reading about these may make it seem, as one of my [DM] students put it, that "social psychologists get their kicks out of playing tricks on people." Actually, the experiments,

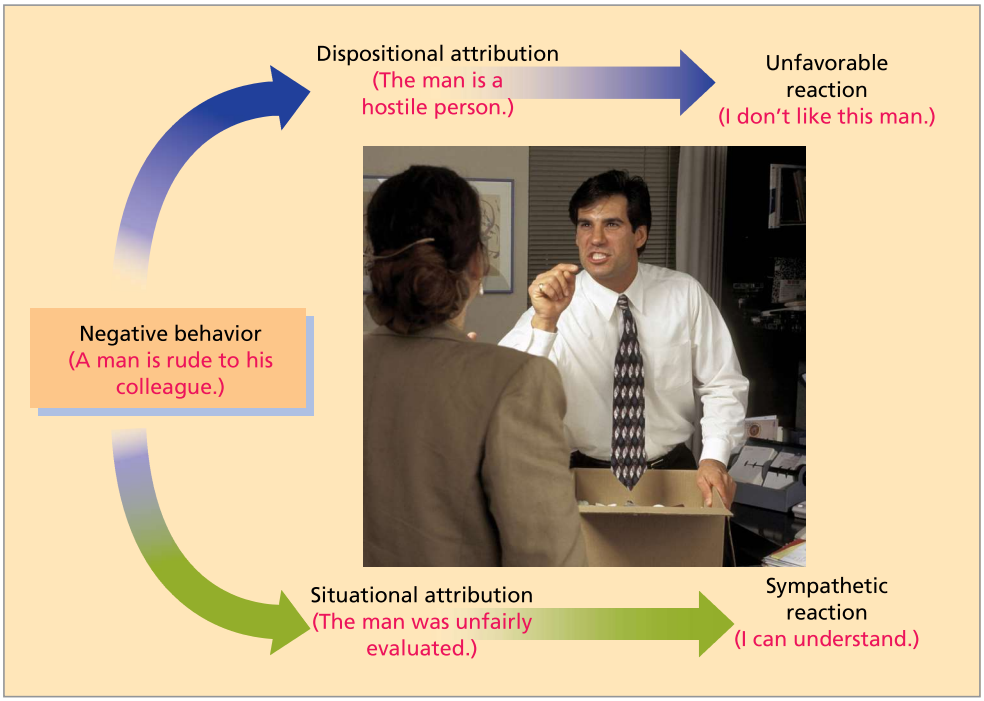


FIGURE :: 5
Attributions and Reactions
How we explain someone's negative behavior determines how we feel about it.
Esbin-Anderson/The Image Works

though sometimes amusing, are not designed to demonstrate "what fools these mortals be." Their serious purpose is to reveal how we think about ourselves and others.

If our capacity for illusion and self-deception is shocking, remember that our modes of thought are generally adaptive. Illusory thinking is a by-product of our mind's strategies for simplifying complex information. It parallels our perceptual mechanisms, which generally give us useful images of the world but sometimes lead us astray.

A second reason for focusing on thinking biases such as the fundamental attribution error is humanitarian. One of social psychology's "great humanizing messages," note Thomas Gilovich and Richard Eibach (2001), is that people should not always be blamed for their problems: "More often than people are willing to acknowledge, failure, disability, and misfortune are . . . the product of real environmental causes."

"Most poor people are not lazy. . . . They catch the early bus. They raise other people's children. They clean the streets. No, no, they're not lazy."

—The Reverend Jesse Jackson, Address to the Democratic National Convention, July, 1988

A third reason for focusing on biases is that we are mostly unaware of them and can benefit from greater awareness. As with other biases, such as the self-serving bias, people see themselves as less susceptible than others to attribution errors (Pronin, 2008). You will probably find more surprises, more challenges, and more benefit in an analysis of errors and biases than you would in a string of testimonies to the human capacity for logic and intellectual achievement. That is also why world literature so often portrays pride and other human failings. Social psychology aims to expose us to fallacies in our thinking in the hope that we will become more rational, more in touch with reality, and more receptive to critical thinking.

SUMMING UP: How Do We Explain Our Social Worlds?

- *Attribution theory* involves how we explain people's behavior. *Misattribution*—attributing a behavior to the wrong source—is a major factor in sexual harassment, as a person in power (typically male) interprets friendliness as a sexual come-on.
- Although we usually make reasonable attributions, we often commit the *fundamental attribution error* when explaining other people's behavior. We attribute their behavior so much to their inner traits and attitudes that we discount situational constraints, even when those are obvious. We make this attribution error partly because when we watch someone act, that *person* is the focus of our attention and the situation is relatively invisible. When *we* act, our attention is usually on what we are reacting to—the situation is more visible.

HOW DO OUR SOCIAL BELIEFS MATTER?

Gain insight into how our expectations of our social worlds matter.

Having considered how we explain and judge others—efficiently, adaptively, but sometimes erroneously—we conclude this chapter by pondering the effects of our social judgments. Do our social beliefs matter? Can they change reality?

Our social beliefs and judgments do matter. They influence how we feel and act, and by so doing may help generate their own reality. When our ideas lead us to act in ways that produce their apparent confirmation, they have become what sociologist Robert Merton (1948) termed **self-fulfilling prophecies**—beliefs that lead to their own fulfillment. If, led to believe that their bank is about to crash, its customers race to withdraw their money, their false perceptions may create reality, noted Merton. If people are led to believe that stocks are about to soar, they will indeed. (See "Focus On: The Self-Fulfilling Psychology of the Stock Market.")

self-fulfilling prophecy
A belief that leads to its own fulfillment.

In his well-known studies of *experimenter bias,* Robert Rosenthal (1985, 2006) found that research participants sometimes live up to what they believe experimenters expect of them. In one study, experimenters asked individuals to judge the success of people in various photographs. The experimenters read the same instructions to all their participants and showed them the same photos. Nevertheless, experimenters who expected their participants to see the photographed people as successful obtained higher ratings than did those who expected their participants to see the people as failures. Even more startling—and controversial—are reports that teachers' beliefs about their students similarly serve as

focus ON The Self-Fulfilling Psychology of the Stock Market

On the evening of January 6, 1981, Joseph Granville, a popular Florida investment adviser, wired his clients: "Stock prices will nosedive; sell tomorrow." Word of Granville's advice soon spread, and January 7 became the heaviest day of trading in the previous history of the New York Stock Exchange. All told, stock values lost $40 billion.

Nearly a half-century ago, John Maynard Keynes likened such stock market psychology to the popular beauty contests then conducted by London newspapers. To win, one had to pick the six faces out of a hundred that were, in turn, chosen most frequently by the other newspaper contestants. Thus, as Keynes wrote, "Each competitor has to pick not those faces which he himself finds prettiest, but those which he thinks likeliest to catch the fancy of the other competitors."

Investors likewise try to pick not the stocks that touch their fancy but the stocks that other investors will favor. The name of the game is predicting others' behavior. As one Wall Street fund manager explained, "You may or may not agree with Granville's view—but that's usually beside the point." If you think his advice will cause others to sell, you want to sell quickly, before prices drop more. If you expect others to buy, you buy now to beat the rush.

The self-fulfilling psychology of the stock market worked to an extreme on Monday, October 19, 1987, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 20 percent. Part of what happens during such crashes is that the media and the rumor mill focus on whatever bad news is available to explain them. Once reported, the explanatory news stories further diminish people's expectations, causing declining prices to fall still lower. The process also works in reverse by amplifying good news when stock prices are rising.

In April of 2000, the volatile technology market again demonstrated a self-fulfilling psychology, now called "momentum investing." After 2 years of eagerly buying stocks (because prices were rising), people started frantically selling them (because prices were falling). Such wild market swings—"irrational exuberance" followed by a crash—are mainly self-generated, noted economist Robert Shiller (2005). In 2008 and 2009, the market psychology headed south again as another bubble burst.

self-fulfilling prophecies. If a teacher believes a student is good at math, will the student do well in the class? Let's examine this.

Teacher Expectations and Student Performance

Teachers do have higher expectations for some students than for others. Perhaps you have detected this after having a brother or sister precede you in school, after receiving a label such as "gifted" or "learning disabled," or after taking "honors" classes. Perhaps conversation in the teachers' lounge sent your reputation ahead of you. Or perhaps your new teacher scrutinized your school file or discovered your family's social status. It's clear that teachers' evaluations correlate with student achievement: Teachers think well of students who do well. That's mostly because teachers accurately perceive their students' abilities and achievements. "About 75 percent of the correlation between teacher expectations and student future achievement reflects accuracy," report Lee Jussim, Stacy Robustelli, and Thomas Cain (2009).

But are teachers' evaluations ever a *cause* as well as a consequence of student performance? One correlational study of 4,300 British schoolchildren suggested yes; students whose teachers expected them to perform well indeed performed well (Crano & Mellon, 1978). Not only is high performance followed by higher teacher evaluations, but the reverse is true as well—teachers' judgments predicted students' later performance even beyond their actual ability (Sorhagen, 2013).

Could we test this "teacher-expectations effect" experimentally? Imagine we gave a teacher the impression that Olivia, Emma, Ethan, and Manuel—four randomly selected students—are unusually capable. Will the teacher give special treatment to these four and elicit superior performance from them? In a now-famous experiment, Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) reported precisely that. Randomly selected children in a San Francisco elementary school who were said (on the basis of a fictitious test) to be on the verge of a dramatic intellectual spurt did then spurt ahead in IQ score.

That dramatic result seemed to suggest that the school problems of "disadvantaged" children might reflect their teachers' low expectations. The findings were soon publicized in the national media as well as in many college textbooks. However, further analysis—which was not as highly publicized—revealed the teacher-expectations effect to be not as powerful and reliable as this initial study had led many people to believe (Jussim et al., 2009; Spitz, 1999). By Rosenthal's own count, in only approximately 4 in 10 of the nearly 500 published experiments did expectations significantly affect performance (Rosenthal, 1991, 2002). Low expectations do not doom a capable child, nor do high expectations magically transform a slow learner into a valedictorian. Human nature is not so pliable.

High expectations do, however, seem to boost low achievers, for whom a teacher's positive attitude may be a hope-giving breath of fresh air (Madon et al., 1997). How are such expectations transmitted? Rosenthal and other investigators report that teachers look, smile, and nod more at "high-potential students." Teachers also may teach more to their "gifted" students, set higher goals for them, call on them more, and give them more time to answer (Cooper, 1983; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985, 1986; Jussim, 1986).

In one study, teachers were videotaped talking to, or about, unseen students for whom they held high or low expectations. A random 10-second clip of either the teacher's voice or the teacher's face was enough to tell viewers—both children and adults—whether this was a good or a poor student and how much the teacher liked the student. (You read that right: 10 seconds.) Although teachers may think they can conceal their feelings and behave impartially toward the class, students are acutely sensitive to teachers' facial expressions and body movements (Babad, et al., 1991; Figure 6).

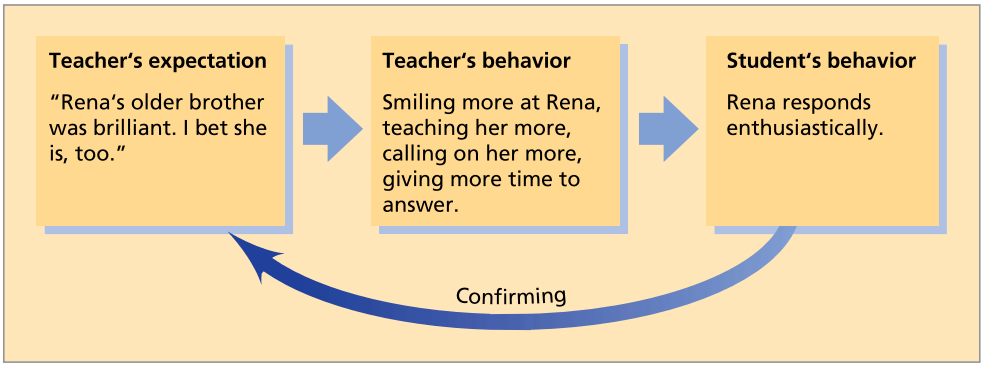
What about the effect of *students'* expectations upon their teachers? You no doubt begin many of your courses having heard "Professor Smith is interesting" and "Professor Jones is a bore." Robert Feldman and Thomas Prohaska (1979; Feldman & Theiss, 1982) found that such expectations can affect both student and teacher. Students who expected to be taught by an excellent teacher perceived their teacher (who was unaware of their expectations) as more competent and interesting than did students with low expectations.

Rosenthal (2008) recalls submitting a paper describing his early experiments on experimenter bias to a leading journal and to an American Association for the Advancement of Science prize competition. On the same day, some weeks later, he received a letter from the journal rejecting his paper and one from the association naming it the year's best social science research. In science, as in everyday life, some people appreciate what others do not, which is why it often pays to try and, when rebuffed, to try again.

Self-presumed expectations associated with one's gender ("women are bad at math") or race ("Blacks don't do so well on aptitude tests") can create anxiety that suppresses test scores. Remove the "stereotype threat" and performance may improve.

To judge a teacher or professor's overall warmth and enthusiasm also takes but a thin slice of behavior—mere seconds (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992, 1993).

FIGURE :: 6
Self-Fulfilling Prophecies
Teacher expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies. But for the most part, teachers' expectations accurately reflect reality (Jussim & Harber, 2005).



Furthermore, the students actually learned more. In a later experiment, women who were falsely told that their male instructor was sexist had a less positive experience with him, performed worse, and rated him as less competent than did women not given the expectation of sexism (Adams et al., 2006).

Were these results due entirely to the students' perceptions or also to a self-fulfilling prophecy that affected the teacher? In a follow-up experiment, Feldman and Prohaska (1979) videotaped teachers and had observers rate their performances. Teachers were judged most capable when assigned a student who nonverbally conveyed positive expectations.

To see whether such effects might also occur in actual classrooms, a research team led by David Jamieson (Jamieson et al., 1987) experimented with four Ontario high school classes taught by a newly transferred teacher. During individual interviews, they told students in two of the classes that both other students and the research team rated the teacher very highly. Compared with the control classes, students who were given positive expectations paid better attention during class. At the end of the teaching unit, they also got better grades and rated the teacher as clearer in her teaching. The attitudes that a class has toward its teacher are as important, it seems, as the teacher's attitude toward the students.

Getting from Others What We Expect

So the expectations of experimenters and teachers, although usually reasonably accurate, occasionally act as self-fulfilling prophecies. How widespread are self-fulfilling prophecies? Do we get from others what we expect of them? Studies show that our perceptions of others are more accurate than biased (Jussim, 2012). Self-fulfilling prophecies have "less than extraordinary power." Yet sometimes, self-fulfilling prophecies do operate in work settings (with managers who have high or low expectations), in courtrooms (as judges instruct juries), and in simulated police contexts (as interrogators with guilty or innocent expectations interrogate and pressure suspects (Kassin et al., 2003; Rosenthal, 2003, 2006). Teens whose parents thought they'd tried marijuana—even though they hadn't—were more likely to subsequently try it (Lamb & Crano, 2014).

Do self-fulfilling prophecies color our personal relationships? Sometimes, negative expectations of someone lead us to be extra nice to that person, which induces him or her to be nice in return—thus *dis*confirming our expectations. But a more common finding in studies of social interaction is that, yes, we do to some extent get what we expect (Olson et al., 1996).

In laboratory games, hostility nearly always begets hostility: If someone believes an opponent will be noncooperative, the opponent often responds by becoming noncooperative (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970). Each party's perception of the other as aggressive, resentful, and vindictive induces the other to display those behaviors in self-defense, thus creating a vicious, self-perpetuating circle. In another experiment, people anticipated interacting with another person of a different race. When led to expect that the person disliked interacting with someone of their race, they felt more anger and displayed more hostility toward the person (Butz & Plant, 2006). Likewise, whether someone expects her partner to be in

a bad mood or in a loving mood may affect how she relates to him, thereby inducing him to confirm her belief.

So, do intimate relationships prosper when partners idealize each other? Are positive illusions of the other's virtues self-fulfilling? Or are they more often self-defeating, by creating high expectations that can't be met? Among University of Waterloo dating couples followed by Sandra Murray and associates (1996a, 1996b, 2000), positive ideals of one's partner were good omens. Idealization helped buffer conflict, bolster satisfaction, and turn self-perceived frogs into princes or princesses. When someone loves and admires us, it helps us become more the person he or she imagines us to be.

When dating couples deal with conflicts, hopeful optimists and their partners tend to perceive each other as engaging constructively. Compared to those with more pessimistic expectations, they then feel more supported and more satisfied with the outcome (Srivastava et al., 2006). Among married couples, too, those who worry that their partner doesn't love and accept them interpret slight hurts as rejections, which motivates them to devalue the partner and distance themselves. Those who presume their partner's love and acceptance respond less defensively, read less into stressful events, and treat the partner better (Murray et al., 2003). Love helps create its presumed reality.

behavioral confirmation
A type of self-fulfilling prophecy whereby people's social expectations lead them to behave in ways that cause others to confirm their expectations.

Several experiments conducted by Mark Snyder (1984) at the University of Minnesota show how, once formed, erroneous beliefs about the social world can induce others to confirm those beliefs, a phenomenon called **behavioral confirmation.** For example, male students talked on the telephone with women they thought (from having been shown a picture) were either attractive or unattractive. The supposedly attractive women spoke more warmly than the supposedly unattractive women. The men's erroneous beliefs had become a self-fulfilling prophecy by leading them to act in a way that influenced the women to fulfill the men's stereotype that beautiful people are desirable people (Snyder et al., 1977).

"The more he treated her as though she were really very nice, the more Lotty expanded and became really very nice, and the more he, affected in his turn, became really very nice himself; so that they went round and round, not in a vicious but in a highly virtuous circle."

—Elizabeth Von Arnim, *The Enchanted April,* 1922

Behavioral confirmation also occurs as people interact with partners holding mistaken beliefs. People whom others believe are lonely behave less sociably (Rotenberg et al., 2002). People who believe they are accepted and liked (rather than disliked) then behave warmly—and do get accepted and liked (Stinson et al., 2009). Men whom others believe are sexist behave less favorably toward women (Pinel, 2002). Job interviewees who are believed to be warm behave more warmly.

Imagine yourself as one of the 60 young men or 60 young women in an experiment by Robert Ridge and Jeffrey Reber (2002). Each man is to interview one of the women for a teaching assistant position. Before doing so, he is told either that she feels attracted to him (based on his answers to a biographical questionnaire) or not attracted. (Imagine being told that someone you were about to meet reported considerable interest in getting to know you and in dating you, or had no interest whatsoever.) The result was behavioral confirmation: Applicants believed to feel an attraction exhibited more flirtatiousness (without being aware of doing so). Ridge and Reber believe that this process, like the misattribution phenomenon discussed previously, may be one of the roots of sexual harassment. If a woman's behavior seems to confirm a man's beliefs, he may then escalate his overtures until they become sufficiently overt for the woman to recognize and interpret them as inappropriate or harassing.



Behavioral confirmation. If each of these people feels attracted to the other, but presumes that feeling isn't reciprocated, they may each act cool to avoid feeling rejected—and decide that the other's coolness confirms the presumption. Danu Stinson and colleagues (2009) note that such "self-protective inhibition of warmth" dooms some would-be relationships.
Chris Rout/Alamy

Expectations influence children's behavior, too. After observing the amount of litter in three classrooms, Richard Miller and colleagues (1975) had the teacher and others repeatedly tell one class that they should be neat and tidy. This persuasion increased the amount of litter placed in wastebaskets from 15 to 45 percent, but only temporarily. Another class, which also had been placing only 15 percent of its litter in wastebaskets, was repeatedly congratulated for being so neat and tidy. After 8 days of hearing this,

and still 2 weeks later, these children were fulfilling the expectation by putting more than 80 percent of their litter in wastebaskets. Tell children they are hardworking and kind (rather than lazy and mean), and they may live up to their labels. Tying the identity to the self is important: Children who were asked to be "a helper" were more likely to help in later tasks than those asked to "help" (Bryan et al., 2014). When children think of themselves as tidy and helpful, they become tidy and helpful.

Overall, these experiments help us understand how social beliefs, such as stereotypes about people with disabilities or about people of a particular race or sex, may be self-confirming. How others treat us reflects how we and others have treated them.

SUMMING UP: How Do Our Social Beliefs Matter?

- Our beliefs sometimes take on lives of their own. Usually, our beliefs about others have a basis in reality. But studies of experimenter bias and teacher expectations show that an erroneous belief that certain people are unusually capable (or incapable) can lead teachers and researchers to give those people special treatment. This may elicit superior (or inferior) performance and, therefore, seem to confirm an assumption that is actually false.
- Similarly, in everyday life we often get *behavioral confirmation* of what we expect. Told that someone we are about to meet is intelligent and attractive, we may come away impressed with just how intelligent and attractive he or she is.

WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE ABOUT SOCIAL BELIEFS AND JUDGMENTS?

View human nature through cognitive social psychology.

Social cognition studies reveal that our information-processing powers are impressive for their efficiency and adaptiveness ("in apprehension how like a god!" exclaimed Shakespeare's Hamlet). Yet we are also vulnerable to predictable errors and misjudgments ("headpiece filled with straw," said T. S. Eliot). What practical lessons, and what insights into human nature, can we take home from this research?

We have reviewed reasons why people sometimes form false beliefs. We cannot easily dismiss these experiments: Most of their participants were intelligent people, often students at leading universities. Moreover, people's intelligence scores are uncorrelated with their vulnerability to many different thinking biases (Stanovich & West, 2008). One can be very smart and exhibit seriously bad judgment.

Trying hard also doesn't eliminate thinking biases. These predictable distortions and biases occurred even when payment for right answers motivated people to think optimally. As one researcher concluded, the illusions "have a persistent quality not unlike that of perceptual illusions" (Slovic, 1972).

Research in cognitive social psychology thus mirrors the mixed review given humanity in literature, philosophy, and religion. Many research psychologists have spent lifetimes exploring the awesome capacities of the human mind. We are smart enough to have cracked our own genetic code, to have invented talking computers, and to have sent people to the moon. Three cheers for human reason.

Well, two cheers—because the mind's premium on efficient judgment makes our intuition more vulnerable to misjudgment than we suspect. With remarkable ease, we form and sustain false beliefs. Led by our preconceptions, feeling overconfident, persuaded by vivid anecdotes, perceiving correlations and control even where none may exist, we construct our social beliefs and then influence others to confirm them. "The naked intellect," observed novelist Madeleine L'Engle, "is an extraordinarily inaccurate instrument."

But have these experiments just been intellectual tricks played on hapless participants, thus making them look worse than they are? Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross (1980) contended that, if anything, laboratory procedures overestimate our intuitive powers. The experiments usually present people with clear evidence and warn them that their reasoning ability is being tested. Seldom does real life say to us: "Here is some evidence. Now put on your thinking cap and answer these questions."

"In creating these problems, we didn't set out to fool people. All our problems fooled us, too."

—Amos Tversky (1985)

Often our everyday failings are inconsequential, but not always so. False impressions, interpretations, and beliefs can produce serious consequences. Even small biases can have profound social effects when we are making important social judgments: Why are so many people homeless? Unhappy? Homicidal? Does my friend love me or my money? Cognitive biases even creep into sophisticated scientific thinking. Human nature has hardly changed in the 3,000 years since the Old Testament psalmist noted that "no one can see his own errors."

"The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out."

—Proverbs 20:5

Is this too cynical? Leonard Martin and Ralph Erber (2005) invite us to imagine that an intelligent being swooped down and begged for information that would help it understand the human species. When you hand it this social psychology text, the alien says "thank you" and zooms back off into space. How would you feel about having offered social psychology's analysis of human life? Joachim Krueger and David Funder (2003a, 2003b) wouldn't feel very good. Social psychology's preoccupation with human foibles needs balancing with "a more positive view of human nature," they argue.

Fellow social psychologist Lee Jussim (2005, 2012) agrees, adding, "Despite the oft demonstrated existence of a slew of logical flaws and systematic biases in lay judgment and social perception, such as the fundamental attribution error, false consensus, over-reliance on imperfect heuristics, self-serving biases, etc., people's perceptions of one another are surprisingly (though rarely perfectly) accurate." The elegant analyses of the imperfections of our thinking are themselves a tribute to human wisdom. Were one to argue that all human thought is illusory, the assertion would be self-refuting, for it, too, would be but an illusion. It would be logically equivalent to contending "All generalizations are false, including this one."

Just as medicine assumes that each body organ serves a function, behavioral scientists assume our modes of thought and behavior are adaptive. The rules of thought that produce false beliefs and deficient intuition usually serve us well. Frequently, the errors are a by-product of our mental shortcuts that simplify the complex information we receive.

Nobel laureate psychologist Herbert Simon (1957) was among the researchers who first described the bounds of human reason. Simon contends that to cope with reality, we simplify it. Consider the complexity of a chess game: The number of possible games is greater than the number of particles in the universe. How do we cope? We adopt some simplifying rules—heuristics. These heuristics sometimes lead us to defeat. But they do enable us to make efficient snap judgments.

"Cognitive errors . . . exist in the present because they led to survival and reproductive advantages for humans in the past."

—Evolutionary Psychologists Martie Haselton and David Buss (2000)

Illusory thinking can likewise spring from useful heuristics that aid our survival. In many ways, heuristics make us smart (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). The belief in our power to control events helps maintain hope and effort. If things are sometimes subject to control and sometimes not, we maximize our outcomes by positive thinking. Optimism pays dividends. We might even say that our beliefs are like scientific theories—sometimes in error, yet useful as generalizations. As social psychologist Susan Fiske (1992) says, "Thinking is for doing."

Might we reduce errors in our social thinking? In school, math teachers teach, teach, teach until the mind is finally trained to process numerical information accurately and automatically. We assume that such ability does not come naturally; otherwise, why bother with the years of training? Research psychologist Robyn Dawes (1980a, 1980b)—who was dismayed that "study after study has shown [that] people have very limited abilities to process information on a conscious level, particularly social information"—suggested that we should also teach, teach, teach how to process social information.

"The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias."

—Learned Hand, "The Spirit of Liberty," 1952

Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross (1980) have agreed that education could indeed reduce our vulnerability to certain types of error. They offer the following recommendations:

- Train people to recognize likely sources of error in their own social intuition.
- Set up statistics courses geared to everyday problems of logic and social judgment. Given such training, people do, in fact, reason better about everyday events (Lehman et al., 1988; Nisbett et al., 1987).

- Make such teaching more effective by illustrating it richly with concrete, vivid anecdotes and examples from everyday life.
- Teach memorable and useful slogans, such as: It's an empirical question. Where did the sample come from? or You can lie with statistics, but a well-chosen example does the job better.

SUMMING UP: What Can We Conclude About Social Beliefs and Judgments?

Research on social beliefs and judgments reveals how we form and sustain beliefs that usually serve us well but sometimes lead us astray. A balanced social psychology will therefore appreciate both the powers and the perils of social thinking.

POSTSCRIPT: Reflecting on Illusory Thinking

"Rob the average man of his life-illusion, and you rob him also of his happiness."

—Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck*, 1884

Is research on cognitive errors too humbling? Surely we can acknowledge the hard truth of our human limits and still sympathize with the deeper message that people are more than machines. Our subjective experiences are the stuff of our humanity—our art and our music, our enjoyment of friendship and love, our mystical and religious experiences.

The cognitive and social psychologists who explore illusory thinking are not out to remake us into unfeeling logical machines. They know that emotions enrich human experience and that intuitions are an important source of creative ideas. They add, however, the humbling reminder that our susceptibility to error also makes clear the need for disciplined training of the mind. The American writer Norman Cousins (1978) called this "the biggest truth of all about learning: that its purpose is to unlock the human mind and to develop it into an organ capable of thought—conceptual thought, analytical thought, sequential thought."

Research on error and illusion in social judgment reminds us to "judge not"—to remember, with a dash of humility, our potential for misjudgment. It also encourages us not to feel intimidated by the arrogance of those who cannot see their own potential for bias and error. We humans are wonderfully intelligent yet fallible creatures. We have dignity but not deity.

Such humility and distrust of human authority is at the heart of both religion and science. No wonder many of the founders of modern science were religious people whose convictions predisposed them to be humble before nature and skeptical of human authority (Hooykaas, 1972; Merton, 1938). Science always involves an interplay between intuition and rigorous test, between creative hunch and skepticism. To sift reality from illusion requires both open-minded curiosity and hard-headed rigor. This perspective could prove to be a good attitude for approaching all of life: to be critical but not cynical, curious but not gullible, open but not exploitable.

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