



Psychology of human relationships

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Humans are **social** animals dependent on others for their well-being. Human relationship psychology is a social psychology option that focuses on relationships between individuals and groups.

The three topics in this option are:

- personal relationships
- group dynamics
- social responsibility.

Studying human relationships has its challenges and it is tempting to oversimplify complex social and psychological issues. One approach to the study of human relationships concentrates on the role of hormones and **genetics**. However, this gives a limited understanding of how relationships develop. **Cognitive** theorists have also contributed to the understanding of relationships by applying **schema theory**, while social psychologists have focused on beliefs, **social identity theory** and the role of **culture**. The notion of an **ingroup** ('us') being contrasted with an **outgroup** ('them' or 'the other') is a key notion underpinning social psychology (see p. 88 for more details).

However, it should be noted that groups are dynamic and represent social and personal **constructions**. For instance, an individual may perceive someone as belonging to several groups (e.g. 'black', 'female', 'lesbian' or 'white', 'male', '**heterosexual**'), whereas the individual may not consider themselves to be identified with those groups or may have a different understanding of what those group labels mean. Overall, the key goals of social psychologists are to understand the complexities of relationships, improve interpersonal relationships, promote social responsibility, and reduce violence. As such, notions such as credibility and trustworthiness, as well as a consideration of ethics are important throughout.

If several of the goals of social psychology are to improve the world, how might these goals influence research and the acceptance of results?

TOK

34 Personal relationships

Topic focus

Discuss factors influencing personal relationships.

34.1 Formation of personal relationships

Content focus

Discuss the role of sociocultural, biological, and cognitive factors in the formation of personal relationships.

In the following section, personal relationships will be discussed in the context of romantic love and romantic relationships. Lindholm (2006) has defined romantic love as an intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other.

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34.1.1 The role of sociocultural factors in the formation of relationships

A **sociocultural** approach to relationship formation assumes that sociocultural events influence who people want to form relationships with. Culture can be defined as a set of attitudes, behaviours, and symbols shared by a large group of people and usually communicated from one generation to the next (Shiraev and Levy, 2004). Attitudes include beliefs (for example, political, religious, and moral beliefs), values, superstitions, and **stereotypes**. Behaviours include **norms**, customs, traditions, and fashions.

The norms and values of a culture affect relationship formation by influencing the perception of romantic love and what people find attractive in another person. In addition, cultural norms can guide who individuals can expect to enter into a relationship with, when they are allowed to start romantic relations, and what characteristics make a good partner.

Attraction

One assumption when studying romantic relationship formation is that attraction is culturally specific. For example, Cunningham et al. (1995) found a major difference in the perception of attractive bodies between cultures. African American men found larger women more attractive than white men did. Swami et al. (2006) compared female physical attributes in the UK and Japan and found many cross-cultural differences occur between British and Japanese perceptions of an attractive female body. The Japanese preferred images of women with significantly lower **body mass indexes** (BMI) than Britons, were more reliant on body shape, and accepted less variation in what was considered attractive in body shape than the Britons. Swami and Tovee (2005) asked 682 participants from the UK and Malaysia to rate a set of images of real women with a known BMI. The results showed that BMI is the primary determinant of female physical attractiveness in both cultures. However, there were significant differences in preferences for physical attractiveness along a gradient of **socioeconomic** development, with **urban** participants preferring images of women with significantly lower BMIs than their **rural** counterparts.

Buss (1994) gave questionnaires to 10 000 people from 37 cultures to investigate which factors were important in relationship formation. He found significant **universals**, such as men preferring younger mates and women preferring older mates, but there were cultural differences in the value of various characteristics. For example, people from mainland China and those from Taiwan placed tremendous value on virginity, as did participants who lived in India and Iran, while those from Finland, Denmark, Sweden, France, and Germany placed much less importance on chastity. Nevertheless, research suggests that men universally value sexual fidelity in a mate more than women. It was noted that cultural specifics were underpinned by biological universals. For example, while there are cultural variations in expressions of wealth, women found the ability to create wealth (industriousness, ambition, social status) as universally attractive.

Love is seen as a clear **cultural construct** not found universally. For example, Buss found that in the USA, love ranked first when measuring what people find important about relationship formation, whereas in Nigeria love ranked fourth. Zulus ranked love seventh (emotional stability and dependability were first in Zulu culture).



A sociocultural approach to relationship formation assumes sociocultural events such as cultural norms regarding attraction and marriage influence who people want to form relationships with.

This suggests the more rural the community, where survival pressures take over, the less important love becomes.

Love may even be seen as a Western 'luxury', but there is a clear link between culture and relationship formation as culture can dictate what is considered important in attraction. Lindholm (2006) has argued that romantic love is neither a universal nor an entirely Western construct, although the notion of romantic love appears to be spreading worldwide as other cultures adopt the 'Western' approach to their relationships. This phenomenon may be partly the result of increasing integration driven by **globalization**.

Marriage

The notion of passionate love as a reason to form a serious relationship can be seen as culturally specific. Goodwin (1995) argues that passionate love is largely a Western construct rather than a universal one, and more traditional societies love the person they marry; not marry the person they love.

Arranged marriages are a sociocultural norm in several cultures and usually mean that the people who get married did not choose their partner alone. Normally the parents make the decision or, in some cases, find a range of possible partners for their child and let them make the decision. In some cases, the person who gets married has no choice at all about the partner or the marriage.

Arranged marriages are seen as unions between two families, with family honour at stake and community involvement in the marriage. Such arrangements are viewed as a 'partnership' to raise children and provide social support for the partners (Dion and Dion, 1993).

Epstein (2012) interviewed 70 couples and also performed a **meta-analysis** of studies of arranged marriages. He concluded that:

- arranged marriages last longer and are happier because feelings of love in arranged marriages tend to gradually increase as time goes on in the relationship
- arranged marriages usually have the advice of a third party (e.g. parents), and so feelings are not the only factor involved; there is an intellectual element
- 'love marriages', where attraction is based on passionate emotions, are less stable, as passion decreases over time by as much as 50 per cent after only 18 to 24 months of marriage.

The success of arranged marriages may partly explain why this method of relationship formation is the accepted norm in many cultures.

Housing

Social and economic policies often mean people have little choice about where and how they live. This can impact relationship formation because of who people interact with and how they interact with each other.

Nahemow and Lawton (1975) aimed to test if more friendships were found among people who live near them. They asked residents in Manhattan, New York, who their three best friends were in the housing area and gathered information about how far

Investigate the Swayamvara system in ancient India.



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away most friendships were based. They found that 88 per cent of the people named a person living in the same building as their first best friend, and nearly half lived on the same floor. Similarly, Bossard (1931) found couples in Chicago who lived within one block of each other were more likely to get married than those who lived two blocks apart and Clarke (1951) found 50% of people marrying in Columbus, Ohio lived within walking distance of each other.

Kerckhoff (1974) referred to this phenomenon as the 'field of availables': people have to be geographically close to each other to reward each other. Being geographically close also allows increased exposure, which leads to familiarity, and people who live near us are more likely to share our social class, values, norms, etc.

However, these decades-old studies have limited **generalizability** to contemporary society because of digital technology and multiculturalism. For instance, people can now reward and 'meet' each other without the need for social proximity, which means that physical geography no longer determines emotional 'proximity'. Furthermore, in modern multicultural societies geographical proximity does not necessarily mean those living close together share the same values.

Sharing the same physical space usually means an increase in the likelihood that people will encounter each other. Zajonc (1971) states the '**mere exposure effect**' assumes mere interaction can produce feelings of attraction, which increases the likelihood people will form relationships. Sixty-four male undergraduates and 64 female undergraduates took part in the study. They were shown four black and white pictures of different male undergraduate students and asked to rate them out of seven on a **Likert**-type scale based on attractiveness.

The results showed that interpersonal attraction varied positively with the frequency of prior encounters, even when those encounters did not entail social interaction. Repeated exposure was found to enhance subjects' feelings of attraction toward the people represented in the stimulus material. People who are encountered more frequently seem to elicit greater feelings of attraction even though little or no social interaction has actually taken place. This suggests that mere interaction can influence attraction under a variety of conditions. It is possible, however, that mere exposure may increase perceived similarity or a reduction of perceived difference, which leads to feelings of greater comfort.

Social cues

Social cues are visual characteristics in an environment that cause people to think, feel, and behave in a certain way. Examples of social cues include body language and facial expression.

Key study: Hill and Buss (2008)

Aim: To measure the extent to which men and women use the presence of members of their sex to inform desirability assessments of potential mates. The study assumes men and women are influenced differently by social cues when making desirability assessments.

Procedure: The participants of this study included over 1200 undergraduate heterosexual women and 369 undergraduate heterosexual men. Participants were

shown pictures of ten people. They were either depicted alone, surrounded by others of the same gender, or surrounded by others of the opposite gender. The participants were then asked to rate the people in the photographs on a ten-point rating scale on five different characteristics.

Findings: Men were more likely to find a woman desirable or attractive if she was surrounded by the same sex or by herself, compared to being surrounded by the opposite sex. However, women were more likely to find males more attractive if they were surrounded by the opposite sex compared to being alone or surrounded by the same sex.

Conclusion: These findings suggest men and women may use the same social cues in **qualitatively** different ways, based on the different evolutionary significance of the cue to each sex. For women, seeing men surrounded by other women gave a '**social proof**' that they had been vetted and deemed attractive by other women. For men, seeing women surrounded by other women also suggests social proofing is important, but it may also suggest the woman in the picture is not promiscuous with men.

34.1.2 The role of biological factors in the formation of relationships

A biological approach to relationship formation assumes biological events influence who people want to form relationships with. Furthermore, it assumes relationships between heterosexual couples serve a survival purpose (that is, passing on the best possible genetic combination to eventual offspring). There are also evolutionary arguments for the presence of homosexuality as a trait in humans, but this section will only focus on heterosexual relationships. From a genetic point of view, attraction is the product of evolution and is therefore an adaptive function.

This is shown by:

- males and females finding different characteristics attractive
- males generally preferring younger women and paying attention to physical details such as teeth and lip colour, hair length and shine, hip size and skin smoothness, which are female characteristics that represent the ability to produce offspring
- females generally preferring older men and paying attention to ambition, wealth, intelligence, social status, energy levels, and good health, which are male characteristics that represent the ability to provide for offspring.

It can be noted that there are some similarities between males and females. For example, females also pay attention to the appearance of a potential mate, and both sexes value 'kindness' and 'intelligence'. However, the gender differences listed above represent generalizations and have theoretical support in the form of the theory of evolution and empirical support in the form of large-scale cross-cultural surveys (e.g. Buss, 1994; 1995).

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MHC genes

A biological approach to relationship formation assumes that attraction occurs between two people because the combination of their **genes** would result in healthy offspring. Evidence for this assumption can be found in the attraction to **pheromones** carried in sweat that contain information about a person's **immune system**. It is assumed that genetically different immune systems complement each other and the mixture of two complementary immune systems should produce a child with a good immune system.

Major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes control the immunological self/non-self discrimination, and subsequently tissue rejection and immune recognition of infectious diseases. Therefore, MHC genes are involved in making sure people stay healthy. It is assumed that MHC genes are the product of **sexual selection** to improve the immune system of offspring and avoid inbreeding. Studies in house mice indicate that both males and females prefer MHC-dissimilar mates, which they apparently recognize by odour cues. Studies in humans have also found MHC-associated odour and mating preferences (Wedekind and Penn, 2000).

Wedekind et al. (1995) aimed to test if a woman will rate a sweaty t-shirt as more attractive if it is from a man with different immune system genes to her own. Forty-nine female and 44 male students were tested to see what type of immune system genes they had. The males were then asked to wear a plain white t-shirt for two days. The worn t-shirts were put in closed boxes until the females were asked to smell them and rate the shirts for pleasantness and sexiness.

The women rated the t-shirts as more pleasant and sexy if they came from a man with a different set of MHC genes. Therefore, Wedekind et al. concluded that people are motivated to find a mate with different immune system genes so their offspring will have stronger immune systems.

Facial symmetry

Facial symmetry is an indication a person has experienced fewer genetic and environmental disturbances, such as diseases, toxins, **malnutrition**, or genetic mutations while growing. It also is suggestive of greater cognitive health, with symmetry indexing the reliability or precision of **developmental** processes (Penke et al., 2009). Linking both cognitive and physical processes supports the **bodily integrity hypothesis** that assumes scoring well on cognitive ability tests might be an indicator of a more general tendency for complex systems in the body to be efficient and healthy (Deary, 2012).

Although the causes of these associations are not understood, bodily cues such as facial symmetry may indicate good cognitive health and better physical health. It has been suggested facial symmetry can be linked with the mathematical equation known as the 'golden ratio', which refers to pleasing, harmonious proportions that conform to a mathematical equation.

Achieving symmetry is a difficult task during human growth, requiring billions of cell reproductions while maintaining a parallel structure. Therefore, achieving symmetry is a visible signal of genetic health.



MHC genes control the immunological self/non-self discrimination, and subsequently tissue rejection and immune recognition of infectious diseases. Therefore, MHC genes are involved in making sure people stay healthy.



When Pythagoras said that 'all is number', could he have meant that even love or beauty has a mathematical formulation?

Perceiving symmetry has a clear cognitive element and is cross-cultural, suggesting it has biological origins. However, it should be noted there are also cross-cultural differences in what is considered beautiful.

Ovulation

Ovulation is thought to influence what characteristics women find attractive in men as well as their own physical appearance, which influences their attractiveness to prospective partners.

Key study: Puts (2005)

Aim: To measure the effect of ovulation on perceived attractiveness of male voices. The study assumed females' perception of 'attraction' changes as they move through their ovulation cycle.

Procedure: Puts obtained voice recordings of 30 men attempting to persuade a woman to go out on a romantic date. Then 142 heterosexual women listened to the recordings and rated each man's attractiveness for a short-term sexual encounter and a long-term committed relationship.

Findings: Women said the deeper voices were more attractive in both mating contexts, but deeper voices were particularly preferred when considering them as prospects for sexual, short-term encounters. Women in the **fertile** phase of their ovulation cycle showed the strongest attraction to men with deep voices.

Conclusion: There is a clear link between ovulation cycles and the perception of attractive characteristics in prospective mates.

Puts et al. (2012) aimed to investigate the impact of woman's cycle on **fertility cues**. They assumed female hormonal shifts may cause facial and vocal changes in women (known as fertility cues) that rendered them more attractive during the most fertile stage of their **menstrual cycle**. They **operationalized** fertility by measuring when **progesterone** levels were at their lowest and **estrogen** levels were at their highest.

At two points in their menstrual cycles Puts et al. took:

- photographs of 202 women's faces
- voice recordings of the women's speaking voices
- saliva samples to measure hormone levels during both sampling sessions.

Five hundred men rated the attractiveness of the women's faces and voices from one of the two sessions. The ratings from the first session were averaged for each woman and compared with ratings for her second session. Puts et al. found that men rate women as more attractive when they are at the most fertile phase of their ovulation cycle.

They also tested female participants and asked 500 women to rate other women's attractiveness across their cycles. They scored the photographs and vocal recordings based on two measures: flirtatiousness and perceived attractiveness to men. They found the female participants also rated the subjects higher on both measures when the subjects were in their more fertile phase.

Ovulation is thought to influence what characteristics women find attractive in men as well as own their physical appearance, which influences their attractiveness to prospective partners. However, caution should be used when assuming such fertility cues are a clear advert for fertility.



Puts et al. concluded the ovulation cycle influences fertility cues for women that are perceived by both men and other women. It suggests facial changes over a woman's cycle could make her appear more or less attractive and could be the result of blood flow, causing colour changes in the face, changes in acne, or changes in puffiness due to water retention.

However, caution should be used when assuming such fertility cues are a clear advert for fertility. It can be assumed cyclic changes of the fertility cues are 'leaked' rather than an explicit advertisement of fertility. Therefore, they are a by-product of female reproductive biology rather than traits that evolved to advertise fertility.

It is thought that unlike female chimps and other mammals, human females conceal their ovulation, giving them more control over their reproduction. Concealing ovulation afforded female ancestors the ability to cheat on their mates, because their mates could not concentrate '**mate guarding**' activities near ovulation if they could not tell when it occurred. This allowed females to obtain the best genes for their offspring (Puts et al., 2012).

The notion of control would suggest females are conscious of the effect their fertility cues have on other people. Haselton et al. (2007) aimed to determine whether female ovulation could be marked by observable changes in **overt** behaviour such as levels of ornamentation and dress style. Thirty partnered women were invited to be photographed during high- and low-fertility cycle phases while wearing dresses and ornamentation. Fifty-nine point five per cent of the women were in a high-fertility phase and 40.5 per cent were in a low-fertility phase.

Forty-two participants were shown the images of the women and asked to rate which women were trying to look more attractive. It was found that the closer a woman was to her fertility phase the more the participants thought she dressed more attractively. This was determined through the amount of ornamentation women wore and how their clothes were perceived.

34.1.3 The role of cognitive factors in the formation of relationships

A cognitive approach to relationship formation assumes cognitive processes influence who people form relationships with.

Physiological arousal

Physiological arousal is a biological phenomenon; however, it has to be interpreted before a person can act. For example, Dutton and Aron (1974) aimed to test if physiological arousal can influence attraction. The researchers selected two bridges in Canada; one bridge was higher and shakier than the other and therefore more frightening. A female interviewer stood on these bridges and stopped men aged between 18 and 35 years old to ask them various questions. She then asked the men to write a story connected with a picture she gave them. She then gave them the telephone number of the psychology department and told them they could call if they wanted to talk further. She told participants a different name depending on which bridge they were on.

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Does the presence of underlying biological universals help or hinder explanations of the human experience in human relationship psychology? What is the future for psychology as an academic subject if human behaviour can be reduced to biological determinants?

The **independent variables** in this study were the levels of fear and arousal, operationalized by type of bridge (shaky and high or not). The **dependent variable** was the levels of attraction, operationalized by the number of phone calls received by the psychology department (which produced **quantitative** data), as well as the levels of sexual content in stories the participants were asked to write. Therefore, the results were both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

The results showed only two of the 16 men from the regular bridge called the phone number, compared with nine out of 18 from the frightening bridge. In addition, there was more sexual content in the stories from the frightening bridge. They concluded that attraction is stronger when there is more physiological arousal from the danger of the bridge. The researchers suggest that attraction occurs when physiological arousal is interpreted as sexual excitement.

Perception of attraction

Perception influences how people think, feel, and behave. For example, Dion (1972) asked women to read reports of severe classroom disruptions by school children. In some cases the report was accompanied by a photograph of an 'attractive' child, while in other cases the photo was of an 'unattractive' child. The subjects tended to blame the disruptive behaviour on the 'unattractive' children, saying that it was easy to see that they were 'brats'. Alternatively, when the photo was of an 'attractive' child, the women were more likely to excuse him or her.

This study is **gender** specific but it suggests perceived physical attractiveness influences thoughts, feelings, and behaviour even when the 'attraction' is non-sexual in nature. The **halo effect** is the false correlation of positive characteristics such as the assumption that someone who has a few positive characteristics has many. A halo effect is sometimes associated with physical attractiveness, i.e. people tend to assume that physically attractive people have other positive characteristics. Verhulst et al. (2010) found attractiveness and familiarity to be strong predictors for selecting people for leadership roles.

Similarity and attraction

Markey and Markey (2007) investigated the extent to which perceived similarity is a factor in the way people choose partners. They recruited 103 female and 66 male single undergraduate students through advertisements to participate in their study. The participants first completed a questionnaire where they rated their own personality in terms of values and attitudes, and then described the personality of their romantic ideal also in terms of values and attitudes. They also completed filler questionnaires that disguised the true purpose of this study. Their perception of their own values was similar to their perception of their ideal partner's values and attitudes and provides empirical support for the notion that people are attracted to partners they perceive to be similar to themselves.

Self-esteem

Kiesler and Baral (1970) aimed to test whether boosting the feelings of **self-esteem** in male participants would increase their chances of talking to an attractive woman. They issued a fake **IQ** test that was given to male participants. They were then given

Cognitive factors such as interpretations of physiological changes, perceptions of attraction, and similarity and self-esteem influence relationship formation.



fake scores that were either high or low. The men were asked to wait in a room and an 'attractive' female entered. They found that the men who had been given high IQ scores were quicker to talk to the woman. Kiesler and Baral (1970) concluded that self-esteem influences the chances of individuals interacting.

Aronson and Linder (1965) aimed to test how a specific series of 'accidentally' overheard compliments would affect male attraction toward women. The participant 'accidentally' overheard the experimenter describe them in one of four ways: all positive, all negative, initially negative but becoming positive, or initially positive but becoming negative. They were then asked to rate the experimenter for attractiveness. The participants liked the experimenter when the evaluation was completely positive; they liked the experimenter even more when the evaluation was initially negative but became positive.

Aronson and Linder (1965) concluded that males prefer a situation when they feel they have overcome an obstacle by changing from unattractive to attractive. Winning people over is more rewarding and boosts self-esteem. Although it should be noted that the difference in participants' initial level of self-esteem before the experiment began may have affected the results. For example, participants with higher self-esteem may not have been affected greatly by negative comments.

34.2 Role of communication in personal relationships

Content focus

Discuss the role of communication in personal relationships.

Interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of information between two or more people using direct or indirect methods. The focus of the study of interpersonal communication is not only on the message itself but also whether the receiver understands the message.

34.2.1 Communicating openness and assurance

Openness means talking about shared history and telling your partner things about yourself that they do not know. It can be viewed as a form of reciprocity where people give the gift of 'sharing' valuable information in a social exchange. Giving assurances means offering comfort and showing an interest in their emotional well-being.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) argued that people have internalized ideologies that act as marital **schemata**. These are internal cognitive models which then frame their actions and perceptions regarding communication. For example, those who saw themselves as 'traditional couples' viewed themselves as more dependent on each other, which led them to have high levels of **assurance** but low levels of openness. 'Independent couples' communicated more in highly expressive styles, with unconventional values and moderate levels of interdependence. It could be argued that 'traditional' couples wanted to avoid conflict and so were less open, whereas

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To what extent can attraction be explained by evolutionary pressures?



Interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of information between two or more people using direct or indirect methods.

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How can complex and deeply personal phenomena such as communication be measured in the human sciences? Researchers may focus on elements they can quantify to allow for statistical analysis to take place and to allow their research to be replicated by others.

'independent' couples wanted to solve problems rather than avoid them. Therefore, communication plays different roles in different relationships.

34.2.2 Managing negativity

Gottman (2000; 2003) argues there are four major emotional reactions that are destructive within relationships and can be used to predict **divorce**: criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt. Among these four, Gottman considers contempt the most potent. Couples who avoid these emotions in their relationships will have more successful couplings, but it should be noted that the presence of negative emotions does not mean there is a problem in the relationship.

According to Gottman, anger does not necessarily have to have a negative impact on relationships. Happy couples can be as frequently angry as unhappy couples and if anger is communicated appropriately it can actually help maintain relationships.

Furthermore, living with an unresolved conflict can be a normal and healthy part of relationship maintenance. Gladwell (2005) found that 69 per cent of happy couples still have the very same unresolved conflicts after ten years, yet remain happy because they do not get gridlocked in the conflict and manage to work around it.

John Gottman argues there are four major emotional reactions that are destructive within relationships and can be used to predict divorce: criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling, and contempt.



Key study: Gottman (2003)

Aim: To test whether older married couples and younger married couples have different approaches to managing conflict, and to test if these different approaches can be correlated with unhappiness in the marriage.

Procedure: In a highly controlled setting, 156 married couples came to a laboratory after not talking to each other for eight hours. In the laboratory, they were observed discussing three topics, and physiological measurements such as heart rate were also taken. The couples discussed what events had happened that day and agreed on one pleasant topic and another topic that they knew they would disagree about. The discussions were video recorded and different emotions were observed.

Findings: The older couples, with longer marriages, communicated more affection to their partner during the discussions, but middle-aged married couples displayed more negative emotion. Couples in unhappy marriages expressed more negative emotions.

Conclusion: Couples in happy marriages were better able to manage their emotional displays to show more positive emotions while withholding negative emotions. Therefore, in successful relationships, people communicate with their partner in a way that avoids negative results.

34.2.3 The role of listening

Ahmad and Reid (2008) argue it is necessary for partners to practise listening to understand how their partner feels and respond in a way that shows they have actually understood what has been communicated. They came to this conclusion while researching traditional roles within marriage as they wanted to test whether couples who believe in traditional roles in a marriage have less satisfaction.

They asked 114 married people of South Asian descent living in Canada to complete a questionnaire. Only one partner completed the questionnaire, and the researchers used a **snowball method** to contact participants: the first participants were given copies of the questionnaire to give to friends and family. The questionnaire contained questions about their attitudes toward marriage; their communication style in the marriage, and their marital satisfaction.

They found traditional role beliefs did not result in lower satisfaction. However, there was a connection between satisfaction and the listening style in the relationship. Those who had traditional beliefs and did not listen to understand their partner were less likely to be satisfied. What is insightful about this particular study is the use of the arranged marriage sample. Despite having less choice in their partner, listening played a key role in producing satisfaction in the relationship. Therefore, arranged marriages with traditional role beliefs can be satisfying, but it is necessary for the partners to practise listening to understand how their partner feels. This is important because it suggests that communication may have a stronger role in maintaining happy relationships than the cultural factors that cause people to marry.

34.2.4 Gender differences in communication styles

Understanding gender differences in communication styles may help to maintain relationships (although this is probably most relevant to heterosexual relationships). Lakoff (1975) argued that women have a less ‘powerful’ form of speech, meaning they tend to swear less, speak more politely, and use more **tag questions** and **intensifiers**. An intensifier serves to enhance and give additional emotional context to the word it modifies. According to Lakoff, women are more likely to use words such as ‘so’, ‘really’ and ‘very’, which bring an extra emotional component to conversations that are not always positive. However, Lakoff was writing in 1975 so, while it may still offer some insight, this statement is open to question in modern Western settings.

Flora and Segrin (2003) carried out a **longitudinal study** and found negative feelings of women toward men could predict problems for the marriage. However, it was reported that the women may not actually realize how harmful their negative messages can be, suggesting men and women may perceive negative messages differently.

In addition, women appear to **self-disclose** more than men. Self-disclosure refers to sharing facts about oneself, usually of an intimate nature. A meta-analysis of self-disclosure studies by Collins and Miller (1994) found people who self-disclose more are more liked and they are more likely to self-disclose to people who they also like, creating a loop of self-disclosure that increases intimacy and being liked. Women may expect the same level of self-disclosure from their male partners that they are accustomed to with their female friends, but men appear to be less interested in this method of communication. For example, Thelwall et al. (2009) compared emotional comments between males and females on MySpace®. Females were more likely to give and receive positive comments than men.

Tannen (1990) also studied communication differences in men and women. She found:

- women are more likely to respond to another person’s negative feelings with understanding and acceptance (‘It is okay to feel like that, sometimes I feel that way too.’)



Lakoff (1975), argued that women have a less ‘powerful’ form of speech, meaning they tend to swear less, speak more politely, and use more tag questions and intensifiers. An intensifier serves to enhance and give additional emotional context to the word it modifies.

- men see negative feelings as a complaint about a problem and so set about trying to solve it. For example, a woman may complain about weight gain during pregnancy. Another woman would say, 'It feels bad because you feel like you have lost control of your body.' A man might say, 'Don't worry. You can join a gym.' In this scenario, the woman feels like her feelings have not been dealt with, whereas the man feels like he has solved a problem and cannot understand why his solution is not appreciated.
- women use more language 'tags' (yup, uh huh, right, yeah). This happens in conjunction with the main speaker, serving as 'support' in the form of overlapping speech. So, when a man says, 'I want to buy a new motorbike,' and the wife says, 'uh huh,' he hears consent, but she was just showing she was listening.
- men interrupt and change the topic more frequently, perhaps because men are competitive and combative and prefer 'banter', which is a teasing and playful exchange of remarks
- women tend to be more inclusive and seek other people's opinion.

West and Zimmerman (1987) investigated the tendency of the different genders to interrupt and use silence in conversation. Through quantitative counting they found that all overlaps and most interruptions during conversations between different genders were made by males.

It could be concluded that frequent interruption and overlaps by males is due to the males wanting to 'compete' for conversational advantage and expecting others to do the same. However, caution should be used when assuming this is a universal trait. For example, Ueno (2004) explored the differences between interaction styles of Japanese men and women and found Japanese women were slightly more likely to interrupt the conversation than Japanese men.

Count how many times males interrupt a conversation compared with females. Are the findings of West and Zimmerman (1987) supported?



34.3 Why relationships change or end

Content focus

Discuss explanations for why relationships change or end.

34.3.1 Communication changes

Knapp et al. (2014) proposed a model (See Figure 34.1) to describe the stages that people go through from the beginning to the end of a relationship. For example: at the start, people become closer by using 'we' instead of 'I' when talking to other people, in order to emphasize their status as a partner. In the later stages, there is less communication between the partners and the 'I' is used more often. This is a sign that the relationship might end.

Stage	Typical events and behaviour
Coming together – growth of the relationship	
Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first meeting and brief interaction • first impressions are formed
Experimenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small talk, testing the other person, and searching for common ground intensifies • relationship becomes friendship • personal disclosures become common, especially regarding feelings about the relationship
Integrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the two lives become more connected and partners consider each other in making plans • those outside the relationship become more aware of the couple • use of 'we' becomes more frequent
Bonding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some form of commitment is made, often ritualized, like engagement, marriage, cohabitation, or friendship rituals
Coming apart – decline of the relationship	
Differentiating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • differences become more obvious and partners desire independence • some arguments over this may begin • more use of 'I' and 'my'
Circumscribing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partners avoid difficult topics in conversation as communication is restricted, but public appearances are maintained
Stagnating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further restrictions in conversation; partners 'know' what the other will say and prefer not to start talking • may stay together in order to avoid greater pain of breaking up
Avoiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or both partners choose to avoid contact, through lateness or alternate commitments, or direct expressions of disinterest
Terminating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical distancing and disassociation as partners prepare to be individuals

Figure 34.1 Knapp and Vangelisti model for change in relationships

There is an emphasis on communication in the Knapp and Vangelisti (1996) model. According to the model, couples begin their relationship actively seeking ways to communicate with each other and a change occurs when the relationship begins to end and they actively seek ways to avoid communicating.

The model explains how this change occurs, but does not fully explain *why* it does. The lack of why in the model means it has low **predictive validity** as it cannot be used to predict which couples will have problems in their relationship. It does have *some* predictive validity, as it can show what the next steps might be.

People in a relationship have a choice about how they communicate their thoughts and feelings. **'Patterns of accommodation'** refers to the process where people respond to their partner's negative behaviour with a certain type of accommodation. These can be divided into constructive accommodations and destructive accommodations.

Constructive accommodations are behaviours such as discussing problems openly; showing and feeling forgiveness and being patient enough to wait for problems to subside. **Destructive accommodations** are behaviours such as giving the 'silent treatment', referring to past failures and physical avoidance. Relationships change for the negative or end when partners adopt greater destructive accommodations than constructive accommodations.

34.3.2 Cognitive change

Attribution changes

When we try to explain other people's behaviour we do not do so in a logical way. We give explanations or attributions for behaviour we see in our environment. Attributions can be dependent on how we feel about the person whose behaviour we are explaining.

Bradbury and Fincham (1990) investigated whether marriage quality was affected by attributions by conducting a meta-analysis of studies. They concluded that successful marriages had **positive biases** to the partner: positive behaviours were seen as the consequence of **dispositional** attributions; negative behaviours were seen as the consequence of **situational** factors. Therefore, if a partner did something negative it was attributed to situational rather than dispositional factors and vice versa.

For unsuccessful marriages the effect was reversed: positive behaviours were seen as the consequence of situational attributions; negative behaviours were seen as the consequence of dispositional factors and vice versa. Therefore, relationships can change negatively or end when there is an increase in negative attributions between the couple.

Perceptions of benefits and rewards

Social exchange theory (SET) assumes relationships are maintained through a constant **cost-benefit analysis** and the costs must not outweigh the benefits (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). The more one invests in a relationship the more one expects in return. A further assumption of SET is balance. It argues that balance must be maintained over the long term with regards to partners' investment and returns: relationships change for the worse or end when there is an imbalance in investment and returns.

However, it is more accurate to talk of perception of imbalances and inequality because each is dependent on an individual's point of view. In addition, the theory cannot be tested rigorously because it is difficult to quantify costs and benefits in a relationship, particularly when they are so open to individual differences and perceptions.

Carlson et al. (2014) analysed data on housework and sex from the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey on a representative sample of 600 married and cohabiting low to moderate-income couples with children. They found that couples who shared the routine housework equally had the most sex (7.74 times a month). They reported the highest level of satisfaction with that frequency compared to the other couples, and also the highest quality of the sexual relationship. Therefore, when men are expected to take part in the housework and share in the upbringing of children, and perceive this as fair within a cost-benefit analysis, it can lead to increased intimacy in Western societies.

SET assumes relationships are maintained through a constant cost-benefit analysis and the costs must not outweigh the benefits (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).



However, cost-benefit analysis is dependent on perception and expectation. If a marriage is built on traditional expectations then the perception of costs/rewards will be different to one built on non-traditional expectations. 'Traditional marriage' may refer to a model where the man focuses on providing economically for the family (the breadwinner) and the woman focuses on taking care of the home and being the main care provider for the children.

Despite Norway having high levels of gender equality, divorce rates for the couples who did equal housework is approximately 50 per cent higher than that of the more traditional couples, where the woman does it all (Hansen and Slagsvold, 2012). This could be interpreted as traditional roles providing clear rules for each person where cost-benefits are also clear, and suggests relationships are more likely to be maintained when agreed roles match the expectations for each partner and each partner feels as though they are being fairly treated within a cost-benefit **paradigm**.

34.3.3 Sociocultural change

Empowerment and financial independence of women

Changes in cultural norms in the West and increasingly in other non-Western countries mean women are more involved in the paid workforce and are actively developing careers. The employment rate of women aged 16 to 64 rose from 53 per cent in 1971 to 66 per cent in 2012, and during the same time period there has been falling employment for men (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

One possible factor is the rise of the service sector and decline of heavy industry beginning in the 1960s, which advantages women and disadvantages men. There are many advantages, both for women and for society as a whole, when women enter paid employment but it also influences relationships. Careers take time and energy to develop, and there is evidence that serious or long-term relationships are being delayed because of this, which puts women under pressure as their fertility declines. The man in the relationship who is also developing a career may feel less pressure to commit as he is not under the same biological time pressure as his fertility does not decline. Therefore, in the early stages of a serious relationship women may feel more pressure because they increasingly have to manage a career and their desire to have children. However, in later relationship stages, women have become more financially independent as well as building up their own financial capital such as investing equally in the family property. Therefore, women are now more able to support themselves outside of marriage than they were in the past, and this, coupled with easier and cheaper divorce options, allows them more freedom of choice if they feel their relationship has broken down.

Less stigma for divorce in Western cultures

UK statistics suggest that divorces are becoming more socially acceptable and are easier to arrange in Western societies.

Year	Number of divorces per 1000 men over 60	Number of divorces per 1000 women over 60
1991	1.6	1.2
2011	2.3	1.6



Research the top ten reasons for divorce in your own culture. Compare with another group or student who has a different culture. Does one gender initiate divorce more than the other? What might be the reasons for this?

Figure 34.2 UK divorce statistics in 1991 and 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2011)

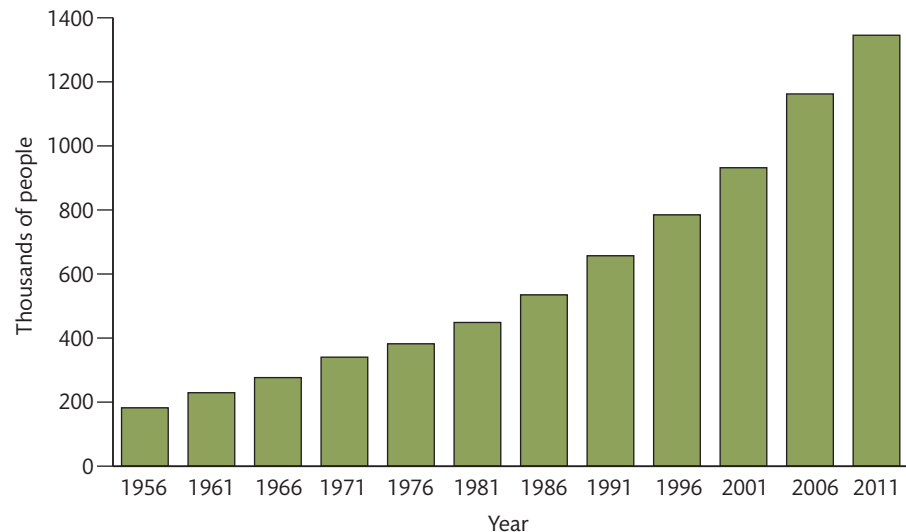
No-fault divorce became an option in some US states in the 1950s. With this change to the law, couples no longer needed to prove that one person was at fault in order to file for divorce; they could simply say the marriage had broken down. By 1970, almost all US states had laws allowing no-fault divorces. From 1940 to 1965, the divorce rate remained near ten divorces for every 1000 married women. By 1979, the rate was 20 for every 1000 married women.

Furthermore, religion has declined in Western societies as a major influence on people's decisions in relationships. This, coupled with legal relaxations, has meant couples are more likely to seek a way out when relationships become problematic.

Ageing and active population

Overall, people in the West are living longer, healthier lives as a result of better healthcare and better education about living healthy lifestyles. While there have been some concerns about levels of obesity and sedentary lifestyles, life expectancy is increasing in most Western developed economies.

Figure 34.3 Graph showing the number of people aged over 60 in Canada



Figures suggest people increasingly choose to end relationships as they get older because they have healthier, longer lives ahead of them.



In the past, couples would reach late middle age and know their lives would soon be over. However, people now increasingly look to start second major relationships as they move through their elongated life cycles. In 2011, the total number of divorces in the UK was 118 000. Of these, 9500 were granted to men aged 60 – a 73 per cent rise from 1991. The figures suggest that people increasingly choose to end relationships as they get older, because they have more healthy years ahead of them.

This is being reflected in **sexually transmitted disease (STD)** rates as people end long-term relationships and embark on new sexual liaisons. For example, in 2013, people aged 55 and older accounted for more than one-quarter (26 per cent) of the estimated 1.2 million people living with diagnosed or undiagnosed HIV infection in the USA (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Furthermore, new trends in medicine have given older men medications for erectile dysfunction, which have enabled more of them to engage in sexual activity throughout their older years. However, older men tend to be less educated about STD risk and actually perceive themselves to be at a low risk, which helps explain the STD figures in this age group.

35 Group dynamics

Topic focus

Discuss factors influencing group dynamics.

35.1 Theoretical foundations

35.1.1 Biological influences

Inclusive fitness refers to the ability of an individual organism to pass on its genes to the next generation. The notion takes into account the direct descendants of the individual as well as the shared genes of close relatives. It can be used to explain how a gene can increase its chances of evolutionary success by indirectly promoting the reproduction and survival of other individuals who share the same genes.

Inclusive fitness can be used to explain why individuals engage in behaviour that helps their ingroup (sometimes at a cost to themselves) while competing with their outgroup. It is the main assumption underpinning kin selection theory, which suggests **intragroup** cooperation behaviour is an adaptation as organisms are motivated to help others who are genetically similar to themselves.

However, it can also be assumed that intergroup competitiveness can be considered an adaptation. For example, non-human primates appear to be sensitive and react to the rankings of other individuals within groups (Sapolsky, 2005) as well as to social category fault lines, distinguishing between the ingroup and outgroups (Bergman et al., 2003). However, competitiveness can also be seen in more primitive species who appear sensitive to situational factors, such as the number of potential competitors. This has been shown in beetle larvae (Smiseth and Moore, 2004) and cockroaches (Zajonc et al., 1969).

35.1.2 Social identity theory

SIT was developed by Tajfel and his colleagues (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and assumes that humans naturally divide the social environment into ingroups, to which an individual belongs ('us'), and outgroups, to which the individual does not belong ('them' or 'the other').

Social categorization reduces perceived differences within the ingroup (we are similar to one another); reduces perceived differences in the outgroup (they are all the same) and increases perceived differences between the ingroup and the outgroup (we are different from them). The exaggeration of ingroup and outgroup differences and intragroup similarities is called the **category accentuation effect**. Individuals usually belong to many groups at the same time and, depending on the group with which they are associating, their behaviour is likely to change to match the group's behaviour.

Social identity refers to the process of how people perceive themselves according to their membership of social groups. It is separate from personal identity, which is how they perceive themselves according to how they perceive their personality traits



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Perceptions of the 'other' are often a mechanism used in the arts to generate tension and drama. To what extent are other areas of knowledge an equally valid way of investigating the human condition?

(Turner, 1982). People tend to assimilate into their group by adopting the group's identity by behaving in the same ways that the group members behave. The group becomes the person's ingroup.

Social comparison refers to the process of how people categorize themselves within a group and so identify themselves as members of the group. They then tend to compare their group (their ingroup) with respect to another group (their outgroup). To improve their self-esteem, group members see their group in a positive light and other groups in a negative light. People also tend to perceive the people in other groups (outgroups) negatively. This is known as **positive distinctiveness** and leads to **prejudicial** thinking and **discriminatory** acts.

SIT can be used to explain **ethnocentrism**, which refers to **ingroup-serving bias** and involves:

- positive behaviours by ingroup members being attributed to dispositional factors
- negative behaviours of ingroup members being attributed to situational factors
- positive behaviours of outgroup members being attributed to situational factors
- negative behaviours by outgroup members being attributed to dispositional factors.

In summary, if we do good things it is because we are good and if we misbehave that is due to external factors. The reverse applies to 'them'.

SIT can also be used to explain stereotyping, which refers to fixed and oversimplified images of an individual or group. Stereotyping of individuals usually occurs because they are perceived to be members of an outgroup and it is assumed they possess the characteristics of the other group members. Therefore, the categorization process that underlies stereotyping implies that members of an outgroup share common attributes, which means they are seen as more similar to each other than they are to other groups' members. SIT shows that perceptions of group **homogeneity**, of both ingroups and outgroups, are linked to social identity processes. Therefore, stereotypes cannot be understood by considering them solely as cognitive devices to simplify thinking, but also the product of sociocultural processes that are ongoing and affect people's thinking.

Group dynamics refer to a system of behaviours and psychological processes that occur within a social ingroup (intragroup dynamics) or between social outgroups (intergroup dynamics). Ingroups and outgroups are defined in terms of comparisons and contrasts with outgroups (Yuki, 2003). The study of group dynamics can be useful in understanding **prosocial** behaviour, prejudice, discrimination, and violence.

35.2 Cooperation and competition

Content focus

Contrast cooperation and competition in relation to group dynamics.

Cooperation refers to a prosocial process of individuals working or acting in a way that leads to mutual benefit. Competition is the direct opposite of cooperation where

Cooperation refers to a prosocial process of individuals working or acting in a way that leads to mutual benefit. Competition is the direct opposite of cooperation where individuals work toward a selfish goal that cannot be shared by the competing parties. Cooperation usually occurs within ingroups as an intragroup process; competition usually occurs between outgroups as an intergroup process.



individuals work toward a selfish goal that cannot be shared by the competing parties. Cooperation usually occurs within ingroups as an *intragroup* process; competition usually occurs between outgroups as an *intergroup* process.

35.2.1 Cooperation

Mere knowledge of shared **group identity** increases cooperative behaviour (Brewer, 2008). The viability of organized groups is increased when their members behave in ways that help the group to function more effectively (Tyler and Blader, 2000).

Tyler and Blader (2001) identified three types of cooperation within ingroups:

- the following of group rules
- conducting work on behalf of the group
- an intention to stay within the group.

However, while intention is primarily cognitive in nature, there is also a social element. If intention is not signalled clearly enough, it might be assumed that the individual lacks motivation to cooperate within the group.

They also distinguish between two types of basic cooperative behaviour:

- mandatory (or required) behaviours, which are specified to be part of particular roles in a group; they originate in the group or from the group leader.
- discretionary (or non-required) behaviours, which go beyond what is required; they originate in a group member, not the group.

SIT can be used to explain ingroup cooperation. For example, it can be assumed people are willing to cooperate with their group as long as it provides them with a positive social identity. When this is not the case, and people are offered the possibility of changing group membership, they will be tempted to do so (Doosje et al., 1999).

This involves a clear ongoing cognitive process as the individual constantly measures the perceived quality of the group as well as the extent to which they are considered a member of it. Both will reflect on the individual's sense of self-worth relative to the group, because the group's success can bring about benefits for their self-identity. Therefore, there is a clear link between the success of the group and the maintenance of a positive sense of self.

Tyler and Blader (2001) argue the extent to which an individual identifies with the group will directly affect ingroup cooperation. **Identification** refers to the degree to which people cognitively merge their sense of self and the group. It can be expected that when people identify more with their group, they will be more willing to act cooperatively. For example, they will invest more time and energy in working toward the group succeeding, in terms of mandatory but also discretionary behaviour. The stronger the identification with the group, the more important it is to the individual for the group to succeed.

Key study: Tyler and Blader (2001)

Aim: To measure the influence of identification on the degree to which people cooperate with groups.

Procedure: Researchers defined identification as the individual's cognitive intermingling of self and group. They asked participants (404 employees (50:50 male to female ratio) with an average age of 30, who worked in a variety of settings chosen to maximize variation in the level of instrumental investment in the work environment) to complete a questionnaire **anonymously**, assessing on a scale of 1–6 the extent to which they defined themselves in terms of their work group membership. For example, they were asked to respond to statements such as: 'My work is important to the way I think of myself as a person', 'When someone praises the accomplishments of my work organization, it feels like a personal compliment to me', 'When I talk about where I work I usually say "we" rather than "they"'. Cooperative behaviour was investigated by **self-report** and was measured according to levels of compliance, deference, and discretionary behaviour. For example, participants were asked how much they thought they followed the rules, implemented their supervisor's directives even when unobserved, exerted 'full effort' in their roles, volunteered to help others, helped their supervisor, and the extent to which they were considering leaving their place of work. They were also **reverse scored** on the extent to which they thought they completed substandard work and hindered their supervisor.

Findings: People's identification with their group has an important role in shaping their behaviours within that group. Identification is a strong and significant predictor of compliance, deference, and discretionary behaviour. Extra-role behaviour shows an especially strong effect for identification.

Conclusion: People who identify most with their group are more likely to cooperate, less likely to engage in uncooperative behaviours and more likely to engage in discretionary behaviours, even when they are not being observed.

Identity itself is also influenced by perception. For example, the perceived status of the group will influence the degree to which people receive a positive social identity as a result of being a member of a group. If groups serve an important function in the creation and maintenance of a positive social identity, then members of groups perceived as having high status should cooperate more because the person will want to maintain their close connection with the group and therefore maintain the group's existence. The higher the status of the group, the more important it is to the individual for the group to succeed to maintain their positive self-identity.

35.2.2 Competition

The mere existence of socially comparative groups leads to competitive behaviour (Festinger, 1954). According to social comparison theory, individuals are propelled by a basic drive to improve their performance and minimize discrepancies between their and other individuals' performance. Thus, competitiveness is one manifestation of the social comparison process.

The mere existence of socially comparative groups leads to competitive behaviour (Festinger, 1954).



Garcia et al. (2013) argue that **comparison concerns** are the prime motivator for competitive behaviour. These are defined as the desire to achieve or maintain a 'superior relative position'. However, it can be noted that their notion has a definitive quality to it and it is more accurate to state the *perception* of a superior relative position rather than an absolute relative position.

Comparison concerns are dependent on:

- the relevance of a performance dimension to the individual (Tesser, 1988), meaning competitiveness increases the more relevant the activity is to the individual
- the degree of the individual's similarity to the target (Kilduff et al., 2010), meaning competitiveness increases the more similar the individual is to their rival
- the degree of the individual's closeness to the target (Pleban and Tesser 1981), meaning competitiveness increases the closer the individual is to their rival.

Key study: Taylor and Moriarty (1987)

Aim: To measure the extent to which competition and physical distinctiveness play a critical role in **interracial** conflict. It was predicted that the tendency to favour the ingroup over the outgroup is enhanced when groups are competitive rather than interdependent, and when groups are racially dissimilar rather than racially similar.

Procedure: Fifty-six white female college students who were enrolled in a psychology course at the University of Maryland (USA) participated in return for extra course credit. As each participant arrived for a session they were given a numbered card in a seemingly random fashion. However, by prearrangement, the numbers assigned to the participants were always even (two and four) while those for **confederates** were always odd (one and three). They were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate the efficiency and performance of small working groups. They were then informed that for the first part of the study they would be divided into two small groups, each of which would work on identical tasks for the same amount of time. The researcher then announced that participants holding even numbers (**naïve** subjects) would be members of one small group, while those holding odd numbers (confederates) would be members of the other small group. Thus, it was possible to ensure that the ingroup was always white while the outgroup was either white (similar-race condition) or black (dissimilar-race condition). It was determined in pre-tests that participants were equally likely to believe in the randomness of their partnership assignments whether the outgroup was white or black. The relationship (interdependent or competitive) between the two small groups was then manipulated.

Interdependent conditions: Participants were told that any solutions to a problem devised by each small group would be combined in such a way as to provide the best overall solution to the task. If this combined solution met a predetermined standard, members of both groups could win a prize. It was emphasized that both groups could win.

Competition conditions: Participants were told that any solutions devised by each small group would be compared in order to determine which solution came closest to meeting a predetermined standard. The members of the group with the better

solution would win a prize. It was emphasized that one group would win and one group would lose.

The problems to solve were 'reading a case history of a delinquent **adolescent** and recommending an approach to his rehabilitation' and 'writing an advertising slogan for a new brand of toothpaste'. Participants were then asked to rate their mood toward their ingroup and outgroup. The questions were designed to disguise the true purpose of the experiment.

Findings:

- Significant ingroup bias occurred under all conditions.
- Participants exhibited greater ingroup bias in competition conditions than in interdependent conditions.
- Participants in competitive conditions exhibited both increased ingroup attraction and decreased outgroup attraction.
- Participants' attraction for both the ingroup and the outgroup was influenced by competition.

Conclusion: Weak identity can produce ingroup bias. For example, merely telling two strangers that they were members of one small problem-solving group led to significant ingroup preference in all inter-group conditions. However, an element of competition can enhance ingroup bias and lead to decreased outgroup attraction.

Evaluation: The female and Western-centric nature of the participant group mean caution should be used when generalizing the findings. Furthermore, Western societies have become more multi-ethnic since 1987, which means people may identify less with their ethnicities, which would mean the impact on intergroup competition would be less. However, the study does put a difficult subject on a secure empirical foundation. There have been previous studies that have also shown the phenomena of physical distinctiveness affecting intergroup competition. For example, Worchel et al. (1978) operationalized physical distinctiveness as differences in dress, so participants in two groups either dressed similarly (both groups wore white lab coats) or dressed dissimilarly (participants in one group wore white lab coats while subjects in a second group wore red lab coats). It was found that distinctive groups in a competitive relationship were least attracted to each other. Therefore, competition decreases ratings of attractiveness between groups who are seen as physically distinctive.



35.3 Prejudice and discrimination

Content focus

Discuss prejudice and discrimination in relation to group dynamics.

Prejudice refers to unjustified (usually negative) thoughts and feelings toward an individual or group based solely on the individual's perceived membership of a social group. Discrimination refers to behaviour (usually negative) toward an individual or group for being a perceived member of a social group.

Prejudice has effective as well as cognitive components, whereas discrimination is the behavioural extension of these. An individual can hold prejudicial views but these do not always manifest themselves in behaviour. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination are very difficult for psychology researchers to study.

People are usually aware of how socially unattractive prejudice and discrimination can be, and can be prone to the **social desirability bias**. Moreover, groups are not static, they are dynamic and represent social and personal constructions. An individual may perceive someone else as belonging to several groups, whereas the individual themselves may not consider themselves to be identifiable with those groups or may have completely different understandings of what those group labels mean.

35.3.1 Prejudice

Taylor and Moriarty (1987) demonstrated the extent to which competition and physical distinctiveness play a critical role in interracial conflict. They demonstrated how ingroup favouritism over the outgroup is enhanced when groups are competitive rather than interdependent, and when groups are racially dissimilar rather than racially similar. Therefore, physical distinctiveness as well as real or perceived competition leads to prejudicial thinking.

The **stereotype content model** (SCM) aims to identify the fundamental underlying dimensions that explain some ingroup/outgroup perceptions (Fiske et al., 2002). Fiske argues that thoughts and feelings regarding prejudice can be distilled into two fundamental dimensions of social perception: feelings of warmth and perceptions of competence. However, binary distinctions of high warmth and high competence toward the ingroup and low warmth and low competence toward the outgroup are not always possible or accurate. Frequent mixed clusters combine high warmth with low competence or high competence with low warmth. Furthermore, there are distinct emotions (pity, envy, admiration, contempt) that further differentiate the four competence–warmth combinations.

Therefore, feelings and perceptions toward outgroups are mixed, either pitying (low competence, high warmth) or envying (high competence, low warmth). Stereotypically, the ‘status’ of members of the outgroup usually predicted high competence and any perceived competition with an outgroup usually predicted low warmth. Consequently, it is too simplistic to assume ingroup perceptions of outgroups are characterized by antipathy. Ingroup perceptions of outgroups often include a mix of feelings and perceptions.

Key study: Fiske et al. (2002)

Aim: To measure the extent to which outgroups are defined by mixed perceptions and feelings.

Procedure: A number of studies were conducted using a questionnaire that was given to undergraduate students from the University of Massachusetts who were recruited from various psychology courses. They were asked to rate proposed outgroups on a five-point scale on the basis of how the groups are viewed by US society. Participants rated these groups on scales reflecting warmth, competence, perceived status, and perceived competition.

The instruction read, ‘We are not interested in your personal beliefs, but in how you think they are viewed by others.’ The instruction was intended to reduce social desirability concerns and to tap perceived cultural stereotypes. The outgroups were suggested by the researchers and chosen because they were seen as important for the US cultural scene (for example black people, ‘blue-collar Southerners’, elderly people, gay men, ‘sexy’ women, welfare recipients, Arabs, Asians, feminists, rich people).

Findings: Perceived status was highly correlated with perceived competence. Perceived competition negatively correlated with perceived lack of warmth.

Conclusion: Perceptions of outgroup members include mixed ascriptions of competence and warmth, as defined by low ratings on one dimension coupled with


high ratings on the other. Moreover, stereotypes depict outgroups as competent to the extent that they are also perceived as powerful and high status; stereotypes depict outgroups as relatively warm and nice to the extent that they do not compete with others.

Evaluation: Fiske et al. make a number of relevant criticisms of their own work. For example, they state that outgroups were selected by the researchers and not by the participants. This allowed for **standardization** and measurement across numerous studies, but it also means the methodology is open to criticism that researchers chose the outgroups to fit their **hypothesis**.

Secondly, they state the trait scale was modified slightly across the various studies to address the issue of participant fatigue, which they argue was becoming a problem. This means caution should be used when generalizing from one study to another because they did not use standardized scales throughout the entire research.

Thirdly, the participants were University of Massachusetts undergraduates, so they may have accorded some positive attributes to any given outgroup because of their potential liberal political orientation, 'North-East American subcultural norms' or because of an adherence to the college ethos of **egalitarianism**.

Finally, Fiske et al. argue their own stereotype perceptions may not have been shared with the participants. For example, for 'sexy women' they had 'brainless bimbo' as a referencing image, whereas they state some of their own respondents may have been thinking 'villainous vamp'. However, this final criticism by Fiske et al. is in itself a fairly narrow-minded stereotype, as many people would have other stereotypes in mind when presented with the phrase 'sexy woman' rather than the two listed here.

 It is too simplistic to assume ingroup perceptions of outgroups are characterized by antipathy. Ingroup perceptions of outgroups often include a mix of feelings and perceptions.

TOK

How can prejudice and discrimination be measured in a reliable and valid way?

EE

To what extent does prejudice and discrimination play a role in family relationships?

35.3.2 Discrimination

The behavioural element of discrimination means there has to be an appropriate sociocultural landscape for discriminatory behaviour to manifest. In order for behaviour to be projected into an environment, there has to be either a perceived positive consequence for those discriminating or a perceived lack of negative consequence. In this way, discrimination can become established and self-sustaining.

Etieyibo and Omiegebe (2016) explored the extent to which culture and religion are contributory factors in the discrimination against people with disabilities in Nigeria. Culture can be defined as a shared set of attitudes, beliefs, values, goals and practices that characterizes an institution, an organization, or a group (Uwagie-Eroet et al., 1998). Religion can be seen as part of culture and may be defined as a belief in the existence of a deity or a supernatural power, a being that created and controls the universe and who is worshipped on the basis of such belief (Etieyibo and Omiegebe, 2016).

Discrimination against people with disabilities (and **albinism**) in Nigeria involves serious human rights abuses and can take the following forms:

- the burning of women who are thought to be witches because witches are believed to be evil
- the raping of women with mental illness because it is believed being intimate with them could bring wealth or prolong an individual's life



The behavioural element of discrimination means there has to be an appropriate sociocultural landscape for discriminatory behaviour to manifest. In order for behaviour to be projected into an environment, there has to be either a perceived positive consequence for those discriminating or a perceived lack of negative consequence.

- the killing of people with albinism for rituals because it is believed their body parts could be used for potions that could bring wealth or prolong an individual's life (Oji, 2010). The body parts are then trafficked and sold.

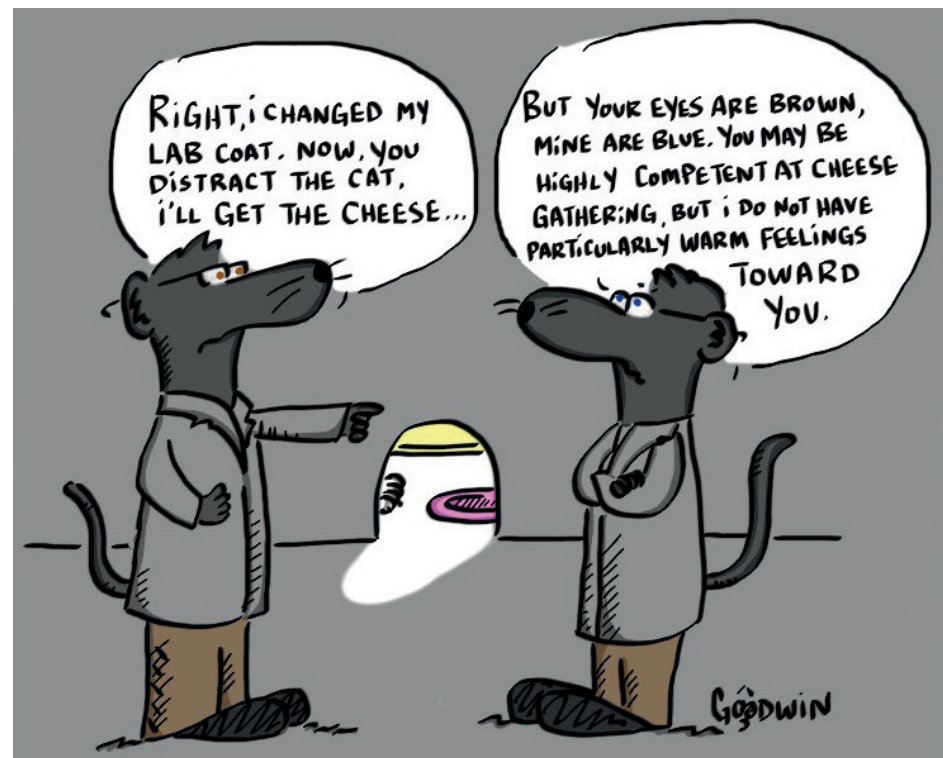
Oliver (1990) argues that disability is a cultural construct and therefore discriminatory practices against persons with disabilities should be seen from this point of view. It is not only the case that people with disabilities are killed on the basis of disability beliefs (e.g. superstition), but these killings are also ritualized, suggesting perpetrators discriminate against disabled persons (and kill them) because they either believe that doing so would make them rich and successful or believe it is part of some ceremony rituals (Etieyibo and Omiegbe, 2016). Therefore, people with disabilities are targeted for their social, personal, and economic benefits, that is, killed for their **utility** value, which is sustained by belief systems embedded in culture (Abang, 1988).

As Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) conclude, both religion and culture exert powerful influence on many Nigerians, not only when it comes to negative attitudes toward people with disabilities, but also in their engagement in highly discriminatory practices against them.

It should be noted that the problem is not confined to Nigeria. Throughout history people with disabilities have been subjected to a large number of oppressive social attitudes, which have included hostility, distrust, pity, overprotection, and patronizing and discriminatory behaviour (Barton, 1993).

Can cultural norms be placed on a hierarchy that can be measured and moderated by a definitive ethical framework? On what basis can that ethical framework be explained and defended? Given the nature of culturally laden perceptions, how reliable is the research of a non-native observer?

TOK



35.4 Origins of conflict and conflict resolution

Content focus

Discuss the origins of conflict and conflict resolution.

Peace psychology is an academic field that focuses on peace and group conflict. The overall aim is to work toward sustainable peace through non-violent methods. This section will focus on the psychological dynamics of groups. However, it should be noted that peace psychology also encompasses politics and diplomacy; military and economic considerations; and sociocultural, international, and national structures that promote or undermine peace.



Peace psychology is an academic field that focuses on peace and group conflict. The overall aim is to work toward sustainable peace through non-violent methods.

Conflict is an ever-present hazard in many cultures around the world.

35.4.1 Origins of conflict

The previous pages have demonstrated how the origins of conflict between groups can be explained from biological, sociocultural, and cognitive perspectives. They are not mutually exclusive to one another. They can be summarized as follows.

- Evolutionary explanations such as inclusive fitness and kin selection theory show how individuals are instinctively driven to favour ingroups at the expense of outgroups. Therefore, intergroup competition and intragroup cooperation can be seen as adaptations.
- SIT was developed by Tajfel and his colleagues and assumes humans naturally divide the social environment into ingroups, to which an individual belongs, and outgroups, to which the individual does not belong.
- Social categorization reduces perceived differences within the ingroup (we are similar to one another); reduces perceived differences in the outgroup (they are all the same) and increases perceived differences between the ingroup and the outgroup (we are different from them). The exaggeration of in- and outgroup differences and intragroup similarities is called the category accentuation effect.

- Social identity is how people perceive themselves according to their membership of social groups.
- Social comparison means people improve their self-esteem by perceiving their ingroup in a positive light and other groups in a negative light. Social comparison can lead to competitive behaviour with social outgroups. Taylor and Moriarty (1987) demonstrate how physical distinctiveness along racial lines plays a critical role in the origins of conflict.
- SIT can be used to explain ethnocentrism, which refers to an ingroup-serving bias.
- The SCM (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske, 2012) demonstrates how perceived status of outgroups is highly correlated with perceived competence and perceived competition is negatively correlated with perceived lack of warmth, which means that outgroups are perceived as relatively warm and nice to the extent that they do not compete with ingroups.
- Discrimination needs an appropriate sociocultural landscape for it to manifest. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) demonstrate how culture and religion are contributory factors in the discrimination against outgroups.
- Furthermore, **social dominance orientation** (SDO) is a personality trait where individuals have a preference for maintaining and/or increasing the differences between groups, as well as individual group members. Typically, they have personality characteristics of being driven, 'tough', dominant, and relatively uncaring seekers of power. Therefore, SDO is a measure for an individual's preference for **hierarchies** within social systems. Hierarchies provide dominance over lower-status groups both inside groups (intragroup dynamics) and between groups (intergroup dynamics).

To what extent are personality types measureable?

TOK

The origins of conflict and obstacles to conflict resolution can be summarized as (Fuchs, 2004):

- the presence of identifiable ingroups and outgroups
- the presence and promotion of ethnocentricity, where the ingroup is deemed to be superior than the outgroup
- the **dehumanization** of the outgroup
- the legitimization of violence toward the outgroup
- the promotion of 'enemy images' of the outgroup
- the presence of an education system that creates values that promote power differentials between groups such as **authoritarianism** and SDO.

35.4.2 Approaches to resolving conflict

For conflict to be resolved the following needs to occur.

- There needs to be an understanding that group allegiance can lead to intergroup conflict.

Research two conflicts that have either been resolved or are in the process of being resolved. What are the similarities and differences in the processes? Can we establish conflict resolution universals that apply to all situations?



- Group identity is a powerful force (sometimes referred to as the 'collective self') that needs to be accepted and understood by group members before peace resolution can be attempted.
- Structures that promote peace and social responsibility need to be built, maintained, and respected. This can happen in a literal way, such as the building of schools and community centres, but also in a figurative way, such as the building of cultural norms regarding how groups are addressed and described in the media and cultural spaces.

Endogenous court system in post-conflict Rwanda

Rwanda is dominated by two main groups of people: Hutus and Tutsis. These two groups have grievances and perceived differences stretching back over hundreds of years, and each group has vied for dominance over the other through political, military, cultural, and economic struggles. These differences were exploited by European colonial powers for their own ends in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Rwandan **genocide**, also known as the 'genocide against the Tutsi', was a mass slaughter of the Tutsi people by the Hutu people in a 100-day period from 7 April to mid-July 1994. An estimated 500,000 to 1 million Rwandans were massacred. The genocide was planned and encouraged by the Hutu-backed elite and carried out by all levels of society. Communities were destroyed as people went on killing sprees, raping women and children and destroying property.

There has been a significant amount of international attention on Rwanda to try and ensure that peace and reconciliation becomes established in the country, as well as to assess what lessons can be learned for wider African conflicts. Karbo and Mutisi (2008) analysed the impact of a local court system known as the Gacaca courts that are intended to promote conflict resolution and what they term 'psychosocial healing'. They argue that post-conflict reconstruction in Africa is too focused on 'hardware components', such as infrastructure development, to the neglect of psychological (what they term 'software') aspects of reconstruction.

After the war ended, Rwanda's formal courts faced a backlog of over 120,000 prisoners suspected of genocidal crimes and it was clear the Rwandan formal legal system and the international criminal tribunal were not going to be able to deal with all these cases. The introduction of a local court system was a mechanism to decongest the country's prisons, but it was also a tool to promote culturally relevant approaches to conflict resolution in localized settings.

Endogenous means 'to come from within' and can be compared with a conflict resolution approach that originates from external sources such as international bodies or from central government. Endogenous conflict resolution methods are unique, informal, communal, spiritual, context-specific, integrated into life experiences, and respect the cultural viewpoint of the people they serve.

For example, the Rwandan government created the Gacaca Law (2001), which is a community-based judicial approach to conflict resolution and gave local areas the mandate to deal with cases of genocide. Gacaca is a traditional mechanism of



The Rwandan genocide, also known as the 'genocide against the Tutsi', was a mass slaughter of the Tutsi people by the Hutu people in a 100-day period from 7 April to mid-July 1994. An estimated 500,000 to 1 million Rwandans were massacred.

Gacaca is a traditional mechanism of conflict resolution in Rwanda and has traditionally been used to resolve conflict at local levels through dialogue and community justice systems. Gacaca courts are based on voluntary confessions and apologies by perpetrators and are culturally specific to Rwanda.



What are the psychological challenges facing the Gacaca court system in Rwanda and how can they be addressed?

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A Gacaca court in session. This is quite formalized with the presence of furniture. In some cases, participants sit on the grass in an informal gathering.

conflict resolution among the Banyarwanda of Rwanda and has traditionally been used to resolve conflict at local levels through dialogue and community justice systems. Gacaca courts are culturally specific to Rwanda and were used in the past to settle land, property, marital, and other interpersonal disputes. The system is based on voluntary confessions and apologies by perpetrators and is conducted outside: people sit on the grass in the presence of other community members.

Local residents give testimony for and against the suspects, who are usually tried in the communities where they are accused of committing crimes. The Gacaca approach is bound up with the African concept of Ubuntu, which translates to 'humaneness, solidarity'. Ubuntu aims to create an environment where people are able to recognize their humanity is inextricably linked with the shared humanity of others.

Ubuntu also encourages people to see beyond the crimes of the perpetrators by seeking to integrate them back into a single community. The emphasis is on building community cohesion and breaking down ingroup/outgroup perceptions through the shared experiences of truth telling, healing, reconciliation, and public acknowledgement of grief and suffering.



However, there have been key problems with the Gacaca court system:

- The reliance on eyewitness testimony means witnesses can use the system for their own ends because there is very little fact checking of the accounts. The Rwandan government addressed this by the sentencing of one to three years' imprisonment for anyone who makes a false testimony or refuses to testify. However, establishing 'truth' is still problematic.
- The perception became established that the courts were ethnically biased because they seemed focused on crimes committed by the Hutus against the Tutsis. This has led to the Tutsis adopting a group identity of 'genocide survivors', which has perpetuated feelings of ethnocentrism toward the

Hutus as 'genocide perpetrators'. While this may be understandable given the historical facts, it undermines conflict resolution as it perpetuates a cycle of blame and victimhood.

- Sexual offences were not addressed by the court system, which is a reflection of traditional African approaches toward the treatment of sex and women. This has led to women (who were the main victims of sex crimes) becoming a marginalized outgroup with legitimate grievances toward male perpetrators who went unpunished. This has led to claims that the courts have resurrected the traditional Rwandan **patriarchal** culture.
- The genocide dispersed the two main ethnic groups across the geographical landscape. This led to new group identities being established ('Hutu-Tutsi', 'Tutsi-Tutsi' and 'Hutu-Hutu'). The combination of landscape and ethnicity is known as an **ethnoscape** and it was noted that the new groups did not always perceive the localized court system as working in their favour because dispersed people take their cultural expectations with them into new geographical spaces and the court system relied on community healing through shared experiences, which was not always possible.
- The courts are temporary as there is a lack of permanent infrastructure in rural communities (such as police forces or court systems). Therefore, the psychological effects of psychosocial healing and community building can also be temporary if they are not regularly reinforced. Therefore, some international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) not affiliated to national governments have created micro-credit schemes designed for Hutu and Tutsi cooperation to maintain community cohesion.
- The social and open nature of the court system allowed some perpetrators to project a remorseful appearance and receive reduced sentences, which led to feelings of indignation as they were not seen as genuine.



Research micro-credit schemes designed for Hutus and Tutsis and discover what the money is spent on. Some are designed for women. Why is there an emphasis on female empowerment in Africa?



G RIMACING MOUSE MAKES AN ARGUMENT FOR THE BENEFITS OF INDIVIDUALITY IN THE FACE OF FORCED COLLECTIVISM...

36

Social responsibility

Topic focus

Discuss factors influencing social responsibility.

36.1 Bystanderism

Content focus

Discuss factors thought to influence bystanderism.

Bystanderism is when bystanders do not help and have decided not to engage in prosocial behaviour.



When someone needs help in public and other people are around but not directly involved, they are called bystanders. **Bystanderism** is when bystanders do not help and have decided not to engage in prosocial behaviour. The following are factors thought to influence bystanderism.

36.1.1 Diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance

Diffusion of responsibility assumes bystanders are influenced by the number of people around at the time of an event. It can be summed up as: a victim is more likely to receive help the fewer people there are to take action. The more observers there are, the smaller the possibility of them helping.

It can be assumed that people seek cues on how to act from other people. This is known as informational social influence and can lead to **pluralistic ignorance**. Pluralistic ignorance is the notion of a combined group ignorance: large numbers of people can claim to be ignorant of the true nature of an event. If there is only one observer, they will feel a lot of responsibility to act. The more observers there are, the more responsibility has been diffused and there is a greater chance of being believed if they claimed they did not know what was happening.

Darley and Latané (1968) aimed to measure whether the number of other people present affects a person's decision to help. They tested 72 participants who had agreed to go into a room to be part of a recorded conversation about problems at university. Each person was in the room alone and heard the same standardized recorded voices in the same order. The researchers told them that there was either one other participant or five other participants. All of the others were just recorded voices. After some time one person seems to have a seizure and asks for help. The researchers measured how long it took for the real participant to come out of their room and try to help.

The independent variable was the number of people the real participant thought were also present to hear the call for help, and the dependent variable was the presence of informational social influence operationalized by the amount of time taken to try to help.

The results showed within the first two minutes, 85 per cent of the 'alone' participants tried to help, compared to 31 per cent of those who thought four other people could help. Within six minutes, 100 per cent of the alone group had tried to help, compared with 62 per cent of the other group. Therefore, the number of other people bystanders think are also present is a very powerful influence on whether they help or not. They sought cues on how to act from the other voices they could hear. Therefore, a diffusion of responsibility is more likely to lead to bystanderism.

Key study: Piliavin et al. (1969)

Aim: To investigate the effect of several variables on helping behaviour.

Procedure: The researchers created an emergency situation on a New York subway train: four teams of student researchers, each one made up of a victim, model, and two observers, staged standard collapses in which the type of victim (drunk or ill), race of victim (black or white) and presence or absence of a model were varied.

Findings: The victim with a stick was helped 62 out of 65 times and the drunken victim was helped 19 out of 38 times. The helpers were 90 per cent male and 64 per cent of the time they were white. Furthermore, an apparently ill person is more likely to receive aid than one who appears to be drunk, the race of the victim has little effect on the race of the helper, except when the victim is drunk, the longer the emergency continues without help being offered, the more likely it is that someone will leave the area of the emergency, and the expected decrease in speed of responding as group size increased did not actually occur.

Conclusions: The researchers suggest that the causes of the discrepancies are social and cognitive. Males are more likely to help males for two main reasons: that in this time period, it was more socially expected for men to help, and the possible costs for a woman helping are higher because of possible risks.

Evaluation: Piliavin et al. deliberately set out to test the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis put forward by Darley and Latané. In the Darley and Latané experiment it was predicted and found that as the number of bystanders increased, the likelihood that any individual would help decreased and the delay in response would also increase. It should be noted that their study involved bystanders who could not see each other or the victim.

Piliavin et al. (1969) found no evidence in their data for diffusion of responsibility. They suggested the fact that observers in their study could see the victim would have given them clear information regarding the situation. Because the episode was so clear, it may have overwhelmed any tendency to diffuse responsibility. Therefore, the results cannot be used to dismiss the notion of diffusion of responsibility, but does show how results from isolating variables in a laboratory will not always be replicated in a more **ecologically valid** setting.



Diffusion of responsibility assumes bystanders are influenced by the number of people around at the time of an event.

TOK

Can an experiment setting have as much value or ecological validity as research carried out in naturalistic conditions?

36.1.2 Perceived similarity

Social identity theory (see p. 88) can be used to explain the behaviour of bystanders. The notion of social identity refers to how we perceive ourselves according to our membership of social groups. Social categorization means we naturally divide the

Design your own research study (but do not carry it out) that could collect data on bystanderism. What problems do you predict?



social environment into ingroups, to which an individual belongs (us), and outgroups, to which the individual does not belong (them). It results in a reduction of perceived differences within the ingroup (we are similar to one another); a reduction of perceived differences in the outgroup (they are all the same); increases perceived differences between the ingroup and the outgroup (we are different from them), known as the category accentuation effect. There is further theoretical support in the form of kin selection theory, which assumes that individuals help other individuals if they are perceived to be 'kin' or have ingroup or family status.

Levine et al. (2005) aimed to test whether Manchester United football fans were more likely to help a Manchester United fan than a fan of a different team on a match day. They waited for Manchester United fans to walk between two buildings at a university campus. A man ran past each participant, wearing either a Manchester United football shirt, a Liverpool football shirt, or a plain white shirt. The man then fell over and pretended to be hurt, and observers recorded how much help the participant gave.

They found little difference in the help offered to the man when he wore a Liverpool shirt or a plain white shirt, but the participants were much more likely to help him if he was wearing a Manchester United shirt.

Such explicit isolation of variables in this **naturalistic** setting does show the impact of perceived ingroup status on whether to help or not. Although, like the Darley and Latané (1968) study, the deliberate isolation of the variables, even though they were naturally occurring, does limit the generalizability to some extent.

When Levine et al. restaged the fall after asking participants to fill in questionnaires that triggered their football fan identity rather than just a 'Manchester United fan' identity, the amount of help for the other victims went up, thereby demonstrating how group identity can be manipulated, which then impacts thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Piliavin et al. (1969) can also be used to illustrate the effect of perceived similarity. They found some tendency for same-race helping to be more frequent as well as same-gender helping, as men were more likely to help overall. Same-gender helping could be explained by perceived risk on the part of the women bystanders rather than perceived similarity on the part of the males.

36.1.3 Culture and geographical location

Research testing cultural differences in bystanderism assumes that behaviour is affected by economic development and also by cultural notions, such as **simpatia**. Simpatia is an important notion in Hispanic and Latino cultures and refers to social harmony, or 'liking for the other', and a general desire to avoid conflict.

Levine et al. (2001) compared the rate of helping behaviour in different cities around the world. Twenty-three countries were chosen, and the researchers visited one major city from each. They recorded how often someone helped in the following conditions: a person pretending to be blind waiting to cross the road; a person walking along the street in a leg brace and dropping magazines; a person dropping a pen while walking along the street. Rio de Janeiro, which has a low level of economic development, was the city where people helped most often in the three situations. Overall, helping across cultures was inversely related to a country's economic productivity; countries with



Social identity refers to how we perceive ourselves according to our membership of social groups.

the cultural tradition of *simpatia* were on average more helpful than countries with no such tradition. Such findings can also be explained via an ingroup paradigm. Poor people may be more inclined to band together because people experience less anxiety and tension the more cohesive the group (Myers, 1962). It was also found that people cope better with stress when they belong to a cohesive group (Zaccaro et al., 1995).

Caution should be used when generalizing from the findings of Levine et al. All of the confederates in the study were male, which will have decreased the chances of being helped by females; there was an emphasis on urban environments and the results would almost certainly have been different in rural locations; many variables overlap in this natural setting, which makes pinpointing exact causes problematic. Furthermore, different cities have different subcultural norms because different parts of the city have different norms and expectations. It would be difficult to standardize all these variables and compare the different cities. For example, Rio has many poor areas that may have been more hostile than the areas tested, and the geographical nuances of different cities cannot be replicated across the world (e.g. in crime centres, or because of traffic or pavement flow).



Simpatia is an important notion in Hispanic and Latino cultures and refers to social harmony, or 'liking for the other', and a general desire to avoid conflict.



Think about how you, as an IB student, can support or enforce the idea of *simpatia* in your student environment.



36.2 Prosocial behaviour

Content focus

Discuss factors that are thought to influence prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour that benefits another person or has positive social consequences (Staub, 1978). In the context of bystanderism, it is the behaviour of not standing by when someone needs help. This definition is often considered too vague, because although it discusses the outcome of the behaviour, it does not consider the motivation of the behaviour. For any useful study, the reasons behind prosocial behaviour should be considered.

Think about why you find pleasure in CAS activities.



Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour that benefits another person or has positive social consequences (Staub, 1978).



Altruism is often seen as a main motivator for prosocial behaviour. Batson (1991) defines altruism as 'a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare'. However, some people argue that the ultimate goal of all human behaviour is personal pleasure; within this paradigm true altruism cannot exist. Personal pleasure is difficult to define and research, but it seems reasonable to assume that if a person engages in charity work in order to feel good or receive social rewards, **egoistic** motivation is behind the action.

There is a strong argument that prosocial behaviour may reduce or avoid negative feelings, as well as allowing people entry into an 'ingroup' of social do-gooders.

36.2.1 Sociocultural factors

Research testing cultural differences in bystanderism assumes that behaviour is affected by economic development and also by cultural notions (for example, the notion of *simpatia*, see p. 306). Therefore, prosocial behaviour can be said to be influenced by these factors.

Furthermore, prosocial behaviour usually occurs within a social situation with other people around. The notion of diffusion of responsibility assumes people are influenced by the number of people around at the time of an event and was discussed on page 304.

36.2.2 Cognitive and emotional factors

Social identity theory can be used to explain prosocial behaviour, as it assumes people naturally divide the social world into groups. Social identities are cognitive constructs where individuals perceive other individuals to be similar or dissimilar based on certain cues.

Latané and Darley (1970) propose five internal processes that must occur in order for a person to intervene. The person must:

- notice the situation
- appraise it as an emergency
- develop feelings of responsibility
- believe they have skills to succeed
- reach a conscious decision to help.

Therefore, the decision-making process involves cognitive factors (attention, appraising, perceiving, decision making) as well as an **affective** element, which Latané and Darley propose as the feeling of responsibility being a key motivating factor in the decision-making process.

This is supported by Batson's (1991) empathy-altruism model, which examines the emotional and motivational component of prosocial behaviour. It argues that a key component of deciding to act is feeling **empathy** toward an individual, which is known as **empathetic concern**. This is characterized by feelings of tenderness, compassion, and sympathy (Batson, 1991). Note that feelings are partly biological, and people may have different predispositions to feel empathy. Furthermore, empathy can be influenced by day-to-day biological factors such as diet, sleep, and other biological rhythms.

The empathy-altruism model has supporting research with humans. For example, Toi and Batson (1982) aimed to test whether levels of empathy and cost had an impact on how much people would help another person. They asked female psychology students to listen to a radio interview with a psychology student named Carol, who had apparently broken both her legs in a car accident. The researchers then gave participants the opportunity to help Carol with class notes.

- Independent variable A: Empathy level
 - Condition 1: Participants were asked to imagine how Carol is feeling (high empathy condition)
 - Condition 2: Participants were asked to be **objective** and not concerned with how Carol felt (low empathy condition)
- Independent variable B: High- or low-cost conditions
 - Condition 1: High cost. Carol would be in the class. It would be embarrassing to deny her the lecture notes.
 - Condition 2: Low cost. Carol would not be in the class. It would not be as embarrassing to deny her the lecture notes.

Results showed the groups who were told to focus on Carol's feelings were much more likely to offer to help her. In addition, the high empathy group were equally likely to help in either condition. The low empathy group was more likely to help Carol in the high-cost condition.

Researchers concluded the most important factors in people's decision to help is how much empathy they feel and the perceived cost to themselves for helping or not helping. The results can also be used to show how humans engage in a cost-benefit analysis before choosing to help others.

36.2.3 Biological factors

From a genetic perspective, evolutionary success is defined by the number of copies of itself a gene leaves behind in a population. In a gene-centred view of evolution the organism is merely a vehicle or a survival mechanism for the gene (Dawkins, 1976). Such a view helped shift the perspective of evolution from the individual and groups to that of the genes themselves.

Hamilton (1964) argued that members of any given population stand a good chance of sharing genes (for example, an individual's own child carries half of the individual's genes; the child from an individual's sibling will carry a quarter of those genes; and a cousin's child will also share a sixteenth). Therefore, a gene can increase its evolutionary success by indirectly promoting the reproduction and survival of other individuals who also carry that gene.

Inclusive fitness refers to the ability of an individual organism to pass on its genes to the next generation. The notion takes into account the direct descendants of the individual as well as the shared genes of close relatives. Therefore, it can be used to explain how a gene can increase its chances of evolutionary success by indirectly promoting the reproduction and survival of other individuals who share the same genes.



Inclusive fitness refers to the ability of an individual organism to pass on its genes to the next generation. The notion takes into account the direct descendants of the individual as well as the shared genes of close relatives.

To what extent can inclusive fitness be used to explain prosocial behaviour?

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Kin selection is an evolutionary theory that assumes prosocial behaviour exists because it has an adaptive function, meaning it has helped human beings survive and thrive over time.



To what extent does the use of animal models help or hinder knowledge creation in psychology?

TOK

This approach has been used to explain why individuals engage in behaviour that help their group but harm themselves. Inclusive fitness is the main assumption underpinning kin selection theory, which attempts to interpret altruistic social behaviour via genetic **relatedness** while taking into account the benefits and costs associated with altruistic acts.

Kin selection is an evolutionary theory that assumes prosocial behaviour exists because it has an adaptive function, meaning it has helped human beings survive and thrive over time. The theory suggests prosocial behaviour is instinctive rather than cognitive, and argues that organisms are motivated to help others who are genetically similar to increase the chances of the group surviving. For example, in an emergency situation people are more likely to help someone who is interpreted as being in their ingroup than someone in their outgroup.

Kin selection theory has been demonstrated cross-culturally and with animals in a cross-species approach. For example, vampire bats are more likely to share blood with close relatives (Wilkinson, 1984) and squirrels are more likely to warn relatives than non-relatives of predators (Sherman, 1985).

The theory also has empirical support from human participants. Madsen et al. (2007) aimed to test kin selection theory in a laboratory setting in two countries. The researchers asked student participants in the UK to do a painful physical exercise for as long as possible. They promised the students that one of their biological relatives would receive money according to how long the student could stay in this position. They then compared the length of time students were able to stay in the painful position and correlated this with how genetically close the relative was.

In South Africa, they used the same experiment with students of Zulu origin. The independent variable was the degree of biological relatedness and the dependent variable was the amount of time spent in a painful position.

The results showed that biological relatedness was correlated with the amount of time spent in a painful position. This result was the same in both countries. Madsen et al. argued that perceptions of kinship represent a baseline that individuals use when deciding how to behave toward others.

The study also shows the impact of culture on perception. Zulu males helped their cousins as much as their brothers. This is because in Zulu culture, cousins are perceived to be family and part of the social ingroup.

Therefore, while biological relatedness increases levels of prosocial behaviour, this is moderated by circumstantial cues, such as shared developmental environment, familiarity, and social bonding (Sherman et al., 1997). In this way, kinship refers to 'social kinship', not necessarily 'genetic kinship'.

These circumstantial cues do not necessarily reject an underlying genetic link, because it is possible animals have sophisticated ways of understanding who is more or less genetically related, as well as it being more likely that close social groups are genetically related.

Kin selection can be used to explain why individuals engage in acts that help the group but harm themselves. Group selection refers to the idea that natural selection sometimes acts on whole groups of organisms, favouring some groups over others.

This leads to the evolution of traits that are group-advantageous. This contrasts with the traditional 'individualist' view, which assumes Darwinian selection usually occurs at the individual level by favouring some individual organisms over others, which leads to the evolution of traits that benefit individuals (Okasha, 2006; 2015).

Empathy-altruism and kin selection theory compared

There are key differences between the two main approaches to explaining prosocial behaviour.

Kin selection in its Darwinian form is an evolutionary theory, meaning it is focused on biological reasons for altruistic behaviour. For example, behaviour can be inherited through genes. This means that kin selection views altruism as an adaptive response that is natural in animals and humans. Therefore, kin selection assumes research with animals can inform our understanding of human behaviour.

Empathy-altruism comes from the cognitive level of analysis, meaning it is focused on internal psychological processes rather than social or biological ones. It is difficult to research cognitive processes with animal research. Animals cannot explain how they think and feel.

Kin selection assumes people put themselves in danger for other people and therefore, the approach usually focuses on extreme events that threaten the survival of the individual and group, whereas empathy-altruism studies focus more on day-to-day events.

In its purest form, kin selection theory fails to explain prosocial behaviour when helping non-related strangers. However, **nurture kinship** addresses this issue by incorporating an environmental explanation of the behaviour, and there are elements of SIT that can explain why people help others who are unrelated.

It should be noted that these two theories are not opposed to one another, but rather complement each other. For example, it can be seen as highly likely the cognitive processes outlined in the empathy-altruism model (empathy, perception, and motivation) are the result of evolutionary processes.

36.3 Promoting prosocial behaviour

Content focus

Evaluate strategies for promoting prosocial behaviour

Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour that benefits another person or has positive social consequences (Staub, 1978). Therefore, it is often promoted by institutions, such as schools, to create positive behavioural norms. There are various strategies to achieve these outcomes. The two strategies that will be evaluated in this section are:

- Kindness Curriculum (KC) in preschool children
- **emotion coaching.**

36.3.1 Sociocultural considerations

Parents are often the most immediate moderator on a child's prosocial development and therefore, any consideration of promoting prosocial behaviour needs to consider the cultural environment parents create in the home. For example, parents who are warm are likely to engage in pleasant and inherently rewarding interactions with their children, thus providing opportunities for parents to model or coach the regulation of positive emotions. It is thought a positive interaction style leads to a greater ability for the child to foster positive **peer** relationships.

Harsh or power-assertive discipline has consistently been found to be negatively related to prosocial behaviours (Romano et al., 2005), whereas other types of discipline where the emotions of others are emphasized have been found to promote sympathy and prosocial behaviours (Krevans and Gibbs, 1996). Therefore, parenting norms associated with warmth, secure attachment, and responsiveness to distress have been positively related to prosocial outcomes (Zhou et al., 2002).

36.3.2 Cognitive and emotional considerations

Compassion for others is thought to motivate an individual to engage in prosocial behaviour (McGinley, 2008). However, an individual has to regulate their own emotions, and research has shown that individuals who are prone to negative emotions are less likely to engage in prosocial behaviour. If an individual becomes overwhelmed with feelings of personal distress, they can then become focused on relieving their own negative feelings instead of engaging in prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg, 2005). For example, children who have higher levels of **temperamental fear** are more personally distressed in helping situations and are less likely to be labelled as a prosocial individual (Spinrad and Stifter, 2006, cited in McGinley, 2008).

Other aspects of vulnerable temperament, such as shyness, anger, frustration, and general negative emotionality have been similarly found to inhibit children and adolescents' prosocial behaviours (Eisenberg et al., 2004, cited in McGinley, 2008). These findings support the notion that children prone to negative emotions may experience high levels of personal distress, which lessens the likelihood of feeling sympathy and engaging in prosocial behaviours.

36.3.3 Biological considerations

Temperamental fearfulness is thought to strongly influence the ability of a child to internalize societal **standards** regarding prosocial behaviour. This personality trait occurs at such a young age it is assumed to be highly predetermined by biology. Children who are considered highly fearful are especially sensitive to minimal parental discipline that does not cause them to become too emotional. They may also internalize standards more readily than their less fearful counterparts. Children who lack such fear may alternatively adopt societal prosocial standards because they are motivated by a trusting and warm relationship with their caregiver (Kochanska, 1993).

36.3.4 Interactive approach

Studying prosocial behaviour by separating the sociocultural, cognitive, and biological factors is not always helpful. Kochanska (1993) proposed an interactive framework for studying internal **morality** and the internalization of societal standards of prosocial

Parents and children in Western societies tend to view thought violations relating to conscience as being separate to violations in prosocial behaviour.



Temperamental fearfulness is thought to strongly influence the ability of a child to internalize societal standards regarding prosocial behaviour. This personality trait occurs at such a young age it is assumed to be highly predetermined by biology.



To what extent can personality traits be measured?

TOK

behaviour. These standards, which define conscience, typically focus on a child's ability to refrain from behaviour that is prohibited by society. However, caution should be used when assuming children who refrain from violating societal norms are engaged in prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour that benefits another person or has positive social consequences (Staub, 1978). Technically, refraining from committing harm is a prosocial act, but it does not meet the implicit assumption that prosocial behaviour must be an active assertive enterprise usually motivated by a willingness to help others. Kochanska (1993) herself noted that her theory centred around the idea of children prohibiting negative actions rather than engaging in prosocial behaviour. She presents the notion that conscience is better conceptualized as two constructs: moral emotions (e.g. guilt, empathy), and rule-compatible conduct (e.g. internalization of prohibitions and rules) (cited in McGinley, 2008), which are heavily influenced by biological predisposition in the form of temperament and the sociocultural surroundings that for young children is usually defined by the parenting style.

Furthermore, it is clear that anxiety and fearlessness interact with parenting and social norms. For example, anxious children may internalize moral standards from authoritative parents and also be aware of appropriate prosocial behaviour, but then be unable to act on this knowledge under socially challenging conditions (Hastings et al., 2007). Therefore, highly empathic individuals may be unable to cope with others' negative experiences because they also feel the distress of the 'other'. Consequently, the empathic individual becomes focused on their own personal distress instead of developing a sense of sympathy, which leads to prosocial responding. Therefore, any child prone to distress must somehow regulate these negative emotions before they can successfully become prosocial individuals (McGinley, 2008).

TOK

How and by whom should notions of 'prosocial behaviour' be defined and implemented? To what extent should notions of multiculturalism and respect for diverse cultural norms be incorporated into moral discourses in the human sciences?

36.3.5 Strategies for promoting prosocial behaviour

Kindness Curriculum in preschool children

Flook et al. (2015) wanted to test the effectiveness of a 12-week **mindfulness**-based Kindness Curriculum delivered in a public school setting on executive function, **self-regulation**, and prosocial behaviour in a sample of 68 preschool children.

Mindfulness training enhances attention by bringing awareness to a particular attentional object, whether it is the breath, external stimuli, thoughts, or emotions. It entails noticing when the mind has wandered from its object of attention (monitoring) and returning attention back to the chosen object (shifting/cognitive flexibility) (Flook et al., 2015). In the context of the Kindness Curriculum, it is 'child facing' in the sense that the focus is on developing skills within the child to help them regulate their emotional worlds and act prosocially.

In Flook et al. (2015), seven classrooms were recruited from six different elementary schools within a public school district in a medium-sized Midwestern American city. Within these schools, 37.9 per cent of children are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. A total of 99 children were invited to participate and parents of 68 indicated they wished to enrol their child in the study. The sample included a mixed ethnicity with a majority being Caucasian (58.8 per cent).

Participants were randomly assigned by classroom to either a mindfulness-based KC intervention or a wait-list **control** group where no KC was administered. Participants were assessed in individual testing sessions before and after the training period. **Informed consent** was obtained from parents of all child participants before evaluation, and the children were also asked individually whether they wanted to participate before the start of each evaluation session and their decisions were respected.

The intervention group received a 12-week mindfulness-based prosocial skills training course designed for preschool-age children. The foundation of the KC is mindfulness, which is aimed at cultivating attention and emotion regulation, with a shared emphasis on kindness practices (e.g. empathy, gratitude, sharing). The preschool KC incorporated children's literature, music, and movement to teach concepts related to kindness and compassion. The curriculum was taught by experienced mindfulness instructors in a **secular** manner. Student training in the KC consisted of two 20–30-minute lessons each week over a 12-week period, totalling approximately ten hours of training.

Among other measures, such as a sharing task scale, students were assessed by a teacher-rated social competence scale (TSC). The measure was comprised of two subscales: a prosocial behaviour subscale (seven items, showing empathy and compassion for others' feelings) and an emotion regulation subscale (five items, e.g. stopping and calming down when excited or upset). The factors were rated on a six-point Likert-type scale.

The results showed students who participated in the KC training showed larger gains in teacher-reported social competence as compared to the control group. In addition, the control group acted more selfishly (sharing fewer resources with others) over time as compared to the KC group. Comparison of the end-of-year school records showed higher marks/grades for children in the intervention as compared to control group on indicators of learning, social-emotional development, and health. Notably, these differences emerged for second semester report card grades assigned approximately three months after the end of the intervention.

These changes were observed after a relatively short intervention period with a very modest dose of the intervention, which supports the practicality and effectiveness of this approach. The training shows promise as an accessible and cost-effective strategy to promote well-being and prosocial behaviour by training non-cognitive skills. Flook et al. argues that taking a universal preventive approach may set children on a positive trajectory for ongoing development.

Emotion coaching

In a UK-based **pilot study**, Rose et al. (2015) wanted to test the effectiveness on children's behaviour if the adults who worked with them had been taught particular emotion-centric techniques. Adults who worked with the children were given a course in emotion coaching, which was designed to help them deal with children's emotional issues more effectively. It was assumed that the training of the adults would help children by enabling them to tune in more explicitly to their emotions and then engage in more consistently prosocial behaviour. The adults were shown how they could train children to manage their feelings and the behavioural consequences of those feelings.

While the project's training was adult focused, the results would manifest in the prosocial behaviour of the children. For example, the researchers sought to explore the adults' emotions and engage in discussion about their own beliefs and attitudes toward their own and others' emotions, as well as their perceptions of children's behaviour, the assumption being that an adult's underlying emotional functioning generates certain behaviours in children.

Emotion coaching is comprised of two key elements: empathy and guidance. These two elements express themselves whenever 'emotional moments' occur with children.

Emotional empathy involves recognizing, labelling, and validating a child's emotions, regardless of the behaviour. This is designed to promote self-awareness and understanding of emotions within the child. Acceptance by the adult of the child's internal emotional state creates feelings of security, which helps the child to engage with more reasonable solutions.

Guidance involves engagement with the child in problem-solving in order to support the child's ability to learn to self-regulate. The child and adult work together to find alternative courses of action to help manage emotions and prevent future transgressions.

Participants included senior and junior teaching staff, teaching assistants, school support staff, children's service staff including health and social care services, early years practitioners, youth workers and youth mentors, and some parents. The bulk of the data was, however, drawn from 11 schools and the majority (80 per cent) of participants were education staff (largely teachers). Moreover, the behavioural case study was focused on one school.

Participants were trained in emotion coaching techniques in workshops and then supported over the course of one full year where they were expected to implement emotion coaching into their everyday interactions with children.

The effectiveness of emotion coaching in professional practice was to be measured by a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in three main areas:

- improved emotional philosophy and adult self-regulation on the part of the adults
- improved exchanges between adults and children
- improved self-regulation and prosocial behaviour on the part of the children.

These areas were measured qualitatively with data from focus groups and free text responses, with a particular focus on the structure of the participants' stories about emotion coaching usage. They were measured quantitatively through the use of questionnaires with Likert-type scales. For example, participants were asked to rate on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree): 'When a child / young person is angry, I help him / her to identify / name the feeling'.

The improved self-regulation and prosocial behaviour on the part of the children was quantitatively measured by the amount of call outs in class and the amount of exclusions from school. There was also a case study approach to the research with six young people (four 13-year-old boys and two 15-year-old girls) who were considered by the staff to be 'at risk of exclusion'. The 'team around the child' (including the



Emotion coaching is comprised of two key elements: empathy and guidance. These two elements express themselves whenever 'emotional moments' occur with children.

parents) were trained in emotion coaching and then records were kept of internal exclusions.

The qualitative and quantitative data showed the emotion coaching enabled adults to communicate more effectively and consistently with children in stressful situations, to utilize fewer 'emotion dismissing' approaches, and help to de-escalate volatile situations. Furthermore, adults found difficult situations less stressful and exhausting, showing a positive impact on adult well-being. It promoted self-awareness on the part of the children with regards their emotions, positive self-regulation of their behaviour, and helped to generate nurturing relationships.

The quantitative data showed the emotion coaching had significantly reduced the amount of call outs in class and significantly reduced the amount of exclusions. In the case study children there was a total drop in numbers of internal exclusions – from 21 to 13 – and call outs – from 84 to 36 – which was considered by the deputy head of the school to show 'real improvement'.

Overall, the findings from Rose et al. (2015) revealed a reduction in disruptive behaviour and improved prosocial behaviour on the part of the children across the different settings.

Prepare a five-point action plan to improve pro-social behaviour based on the Rose et al. study.



Kindness Curriculum and emotion coaching compared

Mindfulness training enhances attention by bringing awareness to a particular attentional object, whether it is the breath, external stimuli, thoughts, or emotions, whereas emotion coaching focuses on improved emotional philosophy and self-regulation on the part of the adults. It focuses on improved exchanges between adults and children, improved self-regulation, and prosocial behaviour on the part of the children after being around adults who have been emotionally coached. There is a slight issue of semantics and cultural differences because it could be argued the emotion coaching presented here by Rose et al. (2015) is actually a form of kindness curriculum for adults.

In this instance, mindfulness training was 'child facing' in the sense that the focus is on developing skills within the child to help them regulate their emotional worlds and act prosocially, whereas emotion coaching was 'adult facing'. It was assumed that the emotion coaching of the adults would in turn help children by enabling them to tune in more explicitly to their emotions and then engage in more consistent prosocial behaviour.

In this instance, mindfulness training was assessed by a teacher-rated social competence scale (TSC), whereas emotion coaching and the factors were rated on a six-point Likert-type scale and measured by a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data.

37

Approaches to research: psychology of human relationships

Learning focus

Discuss approaches to research dealing with human relationships.

Research dealing with human relationships creates a number of special considerations for researchers. Studying human relationships poses challenges and it is tempting to oversimplify complex social and psychological issues from a research standpoint.

Key goals of social psychologists are to understand the complexities of human relationships, improve interpersonal relations, and promote social responsibility as well as reduce violence between groups. However, it should be noted that groups are not static, they are dynamic and represent social and personal constructions. An individual may perceive someone else as belonging to several groups, whereas the individual themselves may not consider themselves to be identifiable with those groups or may have completely different understandings of what those group labels mean.

Therefore, research into human relationships has to be **credible** and trustworthy if it is to be used as a foundation for public and academic discussion.



Studying human relationships poses challenges and it is tempting to oversimplify complex social and psychological issues from a research standpoint.

37.1 Participant expectations

One of the more important factors to consider in relationship-related research is that the participants are less like to respond **passively** to the research process; they are intimately engaged in it and its findings because the issues relate to their own personal relationships. Researchers need to be aware that relationship research is an active process that requires reflection and interrogation of the data, the participant, and the research context, but it may also lead to participant expectations (also called **reactivity**).

Participant expectations are an issue for all types of social science research but are particularly relevant in relationship-related research. Participants may try to guess the nature of the research or programme and influence the results. If the participant feels they have to behave in certain ways in order to please the researcher, this will affect the value of the data in a negative way.

For example, prejudice has affective as well as cognitive components, whereas discrimination is the behavioural extension of these. An individual can hold prejudicial views, but these do not always manifest themselves in behaviour. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination are very difficult for psychology researchers to study and measure because people are usually aware of how socially unattractive prejudice and discrimination can be and can be prone to the social desirability bias.

Taylor and Moriarty (1987) refer to this as the 'bending over backward' effect where participants try to appear as socially desirable as possible. Researchers have to consider very carefully how to avoid such biases. For example, Fiske et al. (2002) measured the

extent to which outgroups are defined by mixed perceptions and feelings (see p. 296 for details). The choosing of the 'outgroups' by the researchers in this study made it more socially acceptable to express an opinion of them and the researchers were able to further reduce social desirability concerns by stating, 'We are not interested in your personal beliefs, but in how you think they are viewed by others'.

The instruction was intended to tap perceived cultural stereotypes, but it also runs the risk of producing data that does not accurately measure prejudice in society, but instead shows what participants assume represents prejudice in society. One way to minimize the effect of participant expectations and researcher bias is reflexivity throughout the research process.

37.2 The importance of reflexivity

Reflexivity is a process that occurs throughout the research and is based on the assumption that it is important the researcher is aware of his or her own contribution to the construction of meaning in the research process and then makes the reader of their research aware. Such an approach allows the social researcher to reflect on ways in which bias may occur, by acknowledging that his or her own background and beliefs can influence the way the research is conducted.

This line of thinking argues that social researchers should provide sufficient details about issues that may potentially bias the investigation – for example, revealing where they stand in terms of political ideology pertinent to explaining social phenomena (such as feminism or the effects of capitalism).

Fiske et al. (2002) state their own stereotype perceptions may not have been shared with the participants. For example, for 'sexy women' they were originally thinking 'brainless bimbo', but some of their own respondents may have been thinking 'villainous vamp'. This criticism by Fiske et al. is in itself a fairly narrow-minded prediction as many people would have other stereotypes in mind when presented with the phrase 'sexy woman' rather than the two listed here. It might be suggested that the reflexive process engaged in by Fiske et al. (2002) was not deep enough and even when they self-criticized they were still immersed in their own views of the world.

37.3 Choosing an appropriate methodology

Relationship issues are often intertwined. For example, the perception of others is a combination of past experience, biological influences, family expectations, and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, it is important researchers do not apply one method as a definitive approach to researching complex issues. It is likely that a combination of qualitative and quantitative mixed methods is appropriate, with **triangulation** of different data sources. Triangulation refers to the validation of data through cross-verification from two or more sources. The sources are usually theoretical and/or methodological.

37.3.1 Types of triangulation

- **Methodological triangulation:** different methods (e.g. interviews plus observations, questionnaires, and diary analysis)

Reflexivity is a process that occurs throughout the research and is based on the assumption that it is important the researcher is aware of his or her own contribution to the construction of meaning in the research process and then makes the reader of their research aware.



- **Theoretical triangulation:** the search for evidence or approaches that could contradict their interpretation (e.g. a feminist lens; a behaviourist lens; a collectivist lens).
- **Researcher triangulation:** the use of other researchers who would bring different perspectives and experience that might challenge the findings of the report.

For example, Tyler and Blader (2001) aimed to measure the influence of identification on the degree to which people cooperate with groups. They asked participants to complete questionnaires anonymously, assessing on a scale of one to six. However, the issue of measurement poses problems for relationship researchers. Puts (2005) aimed to measure the effect of ovulation on attractiveness of male voices. The study assumed females' perception of 'attraction' changed as they move through their ovulation cycle. Puts obtained voice recordings of 30 men attempting to persuade a woman to go out on a romantic date. One hundred and forty-two heterosexual women then listened to the recordings and rated each man's attractiveness for a short-term sexual encounter and a long-term committed relationship. Puts found a clear link between the ovulation cycles and the perception of attractive characteristics in prospective mates.

Puts et al. (2012) also asked 500 men to rate the attractiveness of the women's faces as they moved through their menstrual cycle. They found men rate women as more attractive when they are at the most fertile phase of their ovulation cycle. They also tested female participants and asked 500 women to rate other women's attractiveness across their cycles and found the female participants also rated the subjects higher on both measures when the subjects were in their most fertile phase.

However, it can be noted that complex behaviour such as attraction and relationship formation cannot be explained by reducing the explanation to simple processes. It is realistic to assume it is a combination of many factors. For example, perception is dynamic and open to influence. It can be influenced by schemas from life experiences, biological events (e.g. ovulation; arousal), physical stimulants such as face shape/symmetry, self-esteem, or perceptions of similarity. Relationships are a complex issue and researchers may be tempted to measure the self-perception aspects of relationships, as they can be readily investigated using traditional methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and self-reports. However, while quantitative measurements may be attractive for eliciting large amounts of data from a relatively large sample size, they may miss the personal nuances inherent within personal relationships.



Relationship issues are often intertwined. For example, the perception of others is a combination of past experience, biological influences, family expectations, and sociocultural contexts. Therefore it is important researchers do not apply one method as a definitive approach to researching complex issues.

37.4 The issue of generalization

Generalization refers to the extent to which results are relevant outside the context of the study. Relationship researchers have to carefully consider the extent to which they want their findings to apply to people other than those who participate in a particular study. Given the importance of sociocultural elements in human relationships, to what extent is it feasible to generalize to other cultures and peoples?

Furthermore, personal relationships are a complex and deeply personal phenomenon that is difficult to access from a research standpoint. For example, many studies assume their participants are heterosexual. How should researchers go about finding out the sexuality of their participants, and to what extent can that be generalized to other populations?

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), it is useful to consider the following forms of generalization.

- **Representational generalization** means findings from research can be applied to populations outside the specific population of the study. Many researchers use psychology students as they are readily available for researchers who work in universities. If a researcher has used small samples that are not selected to be statistically representative, and other non-standardized methods may be used (such as interviews), it makes it difficult to generalize findings to other populations. Therefore, considerations of the uniqueness of certain populations have to be built into relationship-related research. For example, Fiske et al.'s (2002) participants were University of Massachusetts undergraduates, so they may have accorded some positive attributes to any given outgroup because of their potential liberal political orientation, 'North-East American subcultural norms', or because of an adherence to the college ethos of egalitarianism.
- **Theoretical generalization** means theoretical concepts derived from the study can be used to develop further theory. Human relationship issues deal with sensitive topics such as prejudice and discrimination. Fiske et al. (2002) dealt with this problem by choosing the stereotypes for the participants themselves, whereas Worchel et al. (1978) operationalized physical distinctiveness as differences in dress, so participants in two groups either dressed similarly (both groups wore white lab coats) or dressed dissimilarly (participants in one group wore white lab coats while subjects in a second group wore red lab coats). It was found that distinctive groups in a competitive relationship were least attracted to each other. They concluded that competition decreases ratings of attractiveness between groups who are seen as physically distinctive. However, the extent to which these findings can be generalized to racial distinctiveness and wider social theory is open to debate.

Relationship researchers have to carefully consider the extent to which they want their findings to apply to people other than those who participate in a particular study. Given the importance of sociocultural elements in human relationships, to what extent is it feasible to generalize to other cultures and peoples?



To what extent do ethical boundaries help or hinder knowledge creation in human relationship psychology?

TOK

Most respected academic institutions have some form of REC consisting of a multidisciplinary team of professional researchers and/or experienced academics with a balance of gender and cultural backgrounds.



38

Ethical considerations: psychology of human relationships

Learning focus

Discuss ethical considerations in human relationship psychology.

Look back at section 23.1, page 175, which looked at Research Ethics Committees (RECs), what they are responsible for and the ethical considerations that they must think about before approving research.

38.1 Informed consent

As a starting point, participants should know that taking part in research is voluntary and the researcher must provide participants with sufficient information about the study. This is particularly important if the research is conducted by people who have some kind of relation to members of the sample (for example, relationship counsellor;

a university professor), since participation could then be motivated by feelings of obligation. The researcher must provide participants with sufficient information about the study, such as who funded the study, who will conduct the study, how the data will be used, and what the research requires of the participants – for example, in terms of time and the topics the study will address. However, this does not mean the researcher has to give away the overall aim of the study.

It should also be made clear that consent can always be renegotiated. In cases where children aged under 16 years are involved, consent must be obtained from parents or legal guardians. For example, Flook et al. (2015) wanted to test the effectiveness of a 12-week mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum (KC) delivered in a public school setting on executive function, self-regulation, and prosocial behaviour in a sample of 68 preschool children. Participants were randomly assigned by classroom to either a mindfulness-based KC intervention or a wait-list control group. Informed consent was obtained from parents of all child participants before evaluation and the children were also asked individually whether they wanted to participate before the start of each evaluation session and their decisions were respected.

In this kind of study, informed consent is relatively easy to obtain as the researchers were offering something the parents might want. In other instances, researchers may have to use **mild deception**. For example, Aronson and Linder (1965) aimed to test the effect of how a specific series of ‘accidentally’ overheard compliments would affect male attraction toward women. The participant ‘accidentally’ overheard the experimenter describe them in one of four ways: all positive; all negative; initially negative but becoming positive; or initially positive but becoming negative. Aronson and Linder (1965) concluded that males prefer a situation when they feel they have overcome an obstacle by changing from unattractive to attractive; winning over people is more rewarding and boosts self-esteem. However, Aronson and Linder had to deceive their participants as well as subject them to a humiliating ritual of overhearing negative comments about themselves. It is also doubtful whether the insight gained was genuinely ‘new knowledge’ and worth the risk of deliberately manipulating the participants’ self-esteem.

TOK

To what extent does psychology produce knowledge that has not been produced in the sciences, literature, or philosophy?

38.2 Protecting participants from (psychological or emotional) harm

Researchers should take preventive action in all research to avoid harming participants. This is particularly true in sensitive research topics, such as relationship problems or prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Due to the nature of certain methods (e.g. qualitative methods) such as in-depth interviews, participants may disclose very private information that they have never shared with anyone before. This can happen because the interview situation seems like a friendly encounter, where the participant may feel comfortable and safe with an individual who cares about them. However, the participant may regret such revelations and feel upset and so this situation should be avoided wherever possible.

Researchers into human relationships need to be particularly sensitive to people’s feelings. For example, Kiesler and Baral (1970) aimed to test whether boosting the feelings of self-esteem in male participants would increase their chances of talking to

To what extent should findings from studies that violate modern ethical rules be considered as valid in psychology?

TOK

an attractive woman. They issued a fake IQ test that was given to male participants. They were then given fake scores that were either high or low. The men were asked to wait in a room and an 'attractive' female entered. They found the men who had been given high IQ scores were quicker to talk to the woman. Kiesler and Baral (1970) concluded that self-esteem influences the chances of individuals interacting. However, deliberately manipulating people's self esteem in this way would raise serious questions from a modern REC committee. Full debriefs are needed to make sure that participants understand what they have experienced is part of a research study, although this does not mean they are protected from psychological harm while they are taking part.

Therefore, prior to the research and before they agree to participate, participants should have a clear understanding of the topics to be addressed. The researchers must approach sensitive issues through clear and direct questions, so that participants are not drawn into irrelevant and sensitive details by mistake. If participants show signs of discomfort, the researcher should be empathetic and consider stopping the research. If the research has dealt with emotional and sensitive issues, the researcher should try to return to less sensitive topics toward the end. It is not advised that the researcher should provide advice or counsel the participant, but he or she might provide useful information about where to find help if necessary. The researcher has to decide what they will do in these situations and present their intentions to the REC.

38.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and **confidentiality** are a key part of psychological research. Usually, the identity of participants should not be known outside the research team and not usually be identifiable to each other. Potential researchers have to show their RECs how they will guarantee their participants remain anonymous and how the data will be held securely. At no point should any reader of the eventual report be able to guess the identity of the participants.

Confidentiality means that research data will not be known to anyone outside the study. The researcher may have to change minor details in the report to avoid the possibility of participants being recognized. Confidentiality also relates to the way data is stored after the research. If interviews or observations have been recorded and archived, it can be difficult to guarantee total anonymity, so these should be destroyed when transcripts have been made. If the researcher finds it necessary to archive non-anonymized data, the participant should give written informed consent.

In addition, ethical issues in terms of anonymity may arise in case studies or in research designs with a small number of participants, because of the risk that they may be identified in research reports – it is difficult to lose people in a small qualitative crowd.

Activity

Find all of the new words or expressions from this chapter and write them into a document with their definitions and explanations next to them. Be creative and use diagrams or boxes to help make your personal glossary unique and effective.