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## Psychology and Social Behaviour

### Introduction

In this chapter, social behaviour is explained. Four types of social behaviour namely, cooperation, competition, altruism and aggression are also identified. Some of the factors that affect the relative strength of pro-social and anti-social behaviour as well as basic psychological factors affecting social behaviour such as cognition, motivation and interpersonal response traits are discussed.

### Social Behaviour

Social behaviour may be conceived as actions influenced by the presence and behaviour of other persons. That is, actions controlled by the society or seeking to influence others. It could be behaviour influenced by group members. Human social behaviour reflects an ongoing process of inter-dependence.

One of the tasks of the social psychologist is to find the abstract and enduring aspects of social situations and social behaviour. The relationships, interactions, interdependence and influence among people as they affect the social behaviour of people are also of interest to the social psychologist.

### Types of social behaviour

Some social philosophers regard human beings as basically social. Social behaviour can be pro-social or anti-social. Two examples of pro-social behaviour that will be discussed are cooperation and altruism, while competition and aggression will be discussed as examples of anti-social behaviour.

It should be noted that some factors do affect the relative strength of behaviour of an individual who is classified as pro-social or anti-social. These factors include:

- (a) empathy;
- (b) definition of the situation; and
- (c) consequence.

*Empathy:* is an important component in the development of each

person's social nature. It refers to an emotional response that a person makes to cues from another. The basis of mature behaviour and of a sense of self depends on the ability of the person to take the role of others, so as to be able to co-ordinate one's behaviour with those of others.

*Definition of the situation:* It is common knowledge that sometimes, people are unable to agree on common definitions of situations. In the society, the concepts such as fairness or justice are conceived and defined differently by people. In the second instance, the way society determines permissible activities within the society can affect what is regarded as pro, or anti-social behaviour. A given interaction between two people may be defined as more or less hostile depending on how the actors choose to define it.

*Consequence:* Once a society establishes norms, laws and customs, a new source of consequences is introduced. Norms regulate social behaviour partially because people expect disapproval or punishment for not following them.

### **Competition and co-operation**

Competition (an example of anti-social behaviour) and co-operation (an example of pro-social behaviour) will be discussed together as both require that each individual be concerned with personal rewards in the situation. The study of competition or co-operation can be approached through the analysis of games. In football, we can have two teams competing for points, members of each team need to co-operate in the football match to ensure success of the team. This is more of healthy rivalry. However, competition is regarded as an anti-social behaviour when unfair advantage is taken by the other. The rivalry is unhealthy.

Many norms in the Nigerian society suggest that co-operative behaviour is good. In our community, people engage in projects, to benefit the community at large. Such community projects may involve helping one another and at the same time assisting the government to provide amenities for the people within the community.

### **Altruism**

This is a self-sacrificing behaviour, where rewards to another are important relative to self-rewards. It is a helping behaviour which is not mediated by concerns for one's own gains. Altruism will be discussed later, under motivation as a psychological factor affecting social behaviour.

## **Aggression**

Aggression is usually deplored while the social aspect of it may be tolerated. Cases of aggression include murder, war, riot, suicide and brawls. It also includes marginal aggression, such as parents beating children for misbehaving, getting annoyed with oneself for not utilizing an opportunity. In the definition of aggression, the following could be taken into consideration:

- (a) Specific behaviour may be emphasized;
- (b) The style of behaviour may be indicated;
- (c) Consequence of the particular behaviour may be stated; and
- (d) The intentions of the behaviour may be emphasized.

### **Emphasis on specific behaviour**

Aggression in line with this view may be conceived as a "fighting" behaviour.

*Reference to Style* : Some view aggression as a behaviour which is performed enthusiastically or vigorously. It could be more vigorous than the situation calls for.

*Consequence of behaviour* : Aggression could be defined as a behaviour which injures another.

*Emphasis on intention* : In this instance, aggression is perceived as acts intended to hurt another person. An individual judges whether an act is aggressive by inferring the actor's intentions.

### **Models of aggression**

Two classic models of aggression are the biological model and the learning model.

*The biological model* : A kind of biological theory has relied on instincts. The emphasis is that human beings like other animals have certain innate dispositions which lead to aggressive behaviour. Darwin's insight to how various species of animals arose, led to his formulation of the theory of evolution. This theory emphasized competition as a principal agent of natural selection. There is thus, the view that some biological conditions promote aggression. The pros of aggressive behaviour and the survival value of aggression seem to make the biological model popular.

*Learning models*: These models are based on the hypothesis that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. One becomes frustrated

when one cannot get something one is striving for. This hypothesis suggests that frustration always leads to aggression and that aggression always results from frustration. The weakness in this model is the fact that frustration may lead to other responses which include aggression. It is not just only aggression that is always involved.

Competitiveness and aggression will be discussed again under inter-personal response trait, as a basic psychological factor affecting social behaviour.

### **Psychological factors affecting social behaviour**

Social behaviour is affected by three basic psychological factors which are cognition, motivation and inter-personal response traits.

#### *Cognition*

The social behaviour of an individual usually depends on, or is guided by what the individual knows; thinks, believes and what he anticipates. In the light of this, it is important to know how man comes by the idea about things and people which make up his world image.

#### **Some of the principles of cognition**

Knowledge of the principles that govern the growth, development and interactions of these ideas will lead to the understanding of man's behaviour in the society. In essence, man's actions are guided by his cognition, what he knows, thinks, believes and anticipates. The cognition of an individual is selectively organized. Every cognitive organization has two main determinants which are the stimulus factors and the personal factors.

Stimulus factors are those factors emanating from the external stimulus object. A single red dot is likely to stand out among black dots. On the other hand, personal factors are factors which derive from the perceiving individual. Cognitions develop into systems in accordance with the principles of learning and stimulus organization. Separate cognitions of the individual about objects and persons in his world develop into systems of cognitions. It is these systems that direct the social actions of the individual.

The properties of cognition are influenced by the system of which it is a part. When several cognitions are grouped to form a system, the properties of each cognition undergo change. The implication is that we cannot understand an individual's perception unless we know the properties of the system in which the perception exists for him. Cognitive change is typically initiated by changes in the individual's information and wants. As new information becomes available to a person, changes in his thinking may occur. As people learn more about a

subject, new wants may be induced.

The fifth principle is that cognitive change is in part governed by characteristics of pre-existing cognitive systems. That is, the degree and manner in which changes in wants and information produce changes in cognition depend upon the characteristics of pre-existing cognition system in the individual. In other words, the differences in the number of variety of cognition incorporated in one cognitive system: the *multiplexity* of the system; the inter-relatedness: the *consonance* of the various cognitive elements that make up the whole system and the inter-connectedness seem to affect cognitive change. Another assumption about cognition is that cognitive change is partly governed by personality factors. That is, cognitive change is also a function of the characteristics of the person within whom the cognitive system resides. The intellectual ability of the individual, his ability to tolerate cognitive ambiguity and dissonance have implications for social behaviour emanating from cognition.

### **Motivation**

When we ask why an individual exhibits a particular social behaviour, this question is related to motivation. Motivation is the study of direction and persistence of action. The individual's wants, desires or needs are positive forces which impel a person toward certain conditions or goals.

The first assumption is that thought and action of the individual reflect his wants and goals. That is, the wants of an individual integrate and organize all the psychological activities of the individual in directing and sustaining action toward a goal.

The second assumption about motivation is that the wants and goals of the individual continuously develop and change. Wants are varied as the individuals who possess them. Old wants disappear and new ones appear with changes in the physiological state and experience of the individual.

The third assumption is that wants and goals become organized around the self. This is to say that the self plays a crucial role in motivation, organizing the wants and goals of the individual.

The fourth assumption about wants and goals is that the arousal of any particular set of wants depends upon the momentary physiological state, situation and cognitions of the individual. This suggests that some wants have physiological bases, the specific cues in the environmental situation or the product of thinking in the individual.

Some of the wants common to man include:

- (a) the affiliation want;
- (b) the acquisitive want;

- (c) the prestige want;
- (d) the power want;
- (e) the altruistic want;
- (f) the curiosity want.

*Affiliation want* is the desire to be associated with or be in the presence of others. The affiliation want, by drawing people together, makes society possible.

*Acquisition want* is the desire to possess or hoard material possessions. Some people enjoy the possession of houses, cars, clothing etc. While others delight in possessing foreign coins or stamps. The objects of the acquisitive want are usually those things valued by the society in which the individual is a part.

*Prestige want* is the desire to be highly regarded by one's associates. This prestige want motivates the individual to strive for higher status. The prestige want is often fused with the acquisitive and power wants.

*Power want* is the desire to control other persons or objects, to obtain their obedience, to compel their actions or to determine their fate.

*Altruistic want* is the desire to help others. This can be expressed in many ways through sympathy, empathy, philanthropy or through direct actions that show concern for others. The person who has a strong altruistic want has affection and concern for other people and is usually contrasted with the "selfish" person.

*Curiosity want* gives the individual the impelling force to explore and investigate one's environment, to seek novel situation, to strive after knowledge.

### **Interpersonal response traits**

To understand fully the rule of cognition and motivation in the governance of social behaviour, we need to consider what happens to the individual as he reacts to his world. One needs to understand his actions and interactions with others. Each individual, due to the influence of heredity, environment or personal experience, develops a distinctive disposition to respond to other people in characteristic ways. These dispositions, referred to as interpersonal response traits, help us to describe the social man, to understand his behaviour and to predict his actions.

Thus, the first assumption here, is that the social behaviour of the individual is channelled by his interpersonal response traits which are relatively consistent and stable dispositions to respond in distinctive ways to other persons. In other words, in any given society, each person

develops a set of interpersonal response traits that characterizes the individual's social conduct, which channel the behaviour of the individual in a variety of social situations. The second assumption here is that the interpersonal response traits of the individual are the end products of the characteristic experiences in satisfying his most frequently and most intensely aroused wants. An aroused want may thus be immediately fulfilled or delayed. The ways in which an individual proceeds to fulfil his wants and the ways he reduces the frustration of his want, may either have adaptive or maladaptive consequences for individual's later behaviour.

Some of the primary interpersonal response traits may be categorized into three major dispositions:

- (a) Role disposition;
- (b) Sociometric disposition and
- (c) Expressive disposition.

### **Role disposition**

An individual may exhibit one or more of the following dispositions:

- (i) *Ascendance*: an individual who does not mind being conspicuous, and who forcefully puts self forward and defends his rights. The individual is not socially timid.
- (ii) *Dominance*: an assertive individual, who is strong-willed and self confident. The individual is not submissive.
- (iii) *Social initiative*: an individual who is actively involved, does not stay in the background of activities, always organizing. The individual is not socially passive.
- (iv) *Independence*: an individual who is self sufficient, does things in his own way, relies on self and ability. The individual is not dependent.

### **Sociometric disposition**

Some of the sociometric dispositions or types of relationship with others an individual could exhibit include the following:

- (i) *Accepting of others*: an individual who is non-judgemental, sees the best in others, trusts others. The individual is not rejecting others.
- (ii) *Sociability*: an individual who is outgoing, likes to be with people and participates in social affairs. The individual is not unsociable.
- (iii) *Friendliness*: an individual who is approachable, open, warm,



engages in many social relationship with others. The individual is not unfriendly.

- (iv) *Sympathetic*: an individual who is concerned about others, displays kind gestures to other. The individual is not unsympathetic.
- (v) *Empathic*: an individual who places himself in the position of others.

### **Expressive disposition**

Some of the expressive dispositions in the styles of interpersonal functioning an individual can exhibit include the following:

- (i) *Competitiveness*: an individual who sees others as rivals, every relationship is seen as a contest. Non-competitiveness is the reverse behaviour.
- (ii) *Aggressiveness*: an individual who attacks others directly or indirectly, someone who is quarrelsome. The individual who shows the opposite is non-aggressive.
- (iii) *Self-consciousness*: an individual who feels uncomfortable in situations where he or she is different from others, may exhibit excessive stage fright, may feel embarrassed when entering a room when others are already seated. The individual who manifests reverse behaviour exhibits social poise.
- (iv) *Exhibitionistic*: an individual who is prone to ostentation in behaviour or dress, tries to show off or attract attention. The reverse behaviour is an individual who is self-effecting.

Thus, what the individual knows, the wants and goals of the individual and his interpersonal response traits, all affect the social behaviour of man.

### **Summary**

Social behaviour involves the actions influenced by the presence and the behaviour of others. Social behaviour may be pro-social or anti-social. The factors which influence the classification of an individual as being pro-social or anti-social include: (1) empathy, (2) definition of the situation and (3) consequence. Two examples of pro-social behaviour are cooperation and altruism while two examples of anti-social behaviour are competition and aggressiveness. Aggression could be defined with reference to specific behaviour, the style, the consequence of behaviour and the intention of behaviour. Two classic models of aggression are the biological and the learning models, the former emphasizes competition for survival while the latter sees aggression as the consequence of

frustration.

Social behaviour of the individual is affected by three psychological factors which are cognition, motivation and interpersonal response traits.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Outline the types of social behaviour.
2. What do you understand by empathy? How is it different from sympathy?
3. How is social behaviour motivated?

### **Out-of-class activity**

Make a list of observable interpersonal response traits among fellow citizens in your town.

### **Reference for further reading**

Bloom, L. and Selznick, P. *Sociology*. London: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1955.

Kretch, D. *et al*, *Individual in Society*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company Inc., 1962.

Watson, R. I. and Lindgren, H. C. *Psychology of the Child and the Adolescent*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1979.