**22 Altruism and antisocial behaviour**

Altruism: human beings at their best

* Humans have the tendency to unpredictably offer help to those in need, including strangers.
* The proximate causes of empathy appear to be related to empathy. Contemporary research suggests that empathy has a neurological basis involving mirror neurons.
* Altruism also requires an ultimate explanation. One such explanation involves inclusive fitness, the idea that we instinctively favour those with similar genetic make-up in order to promote the survival of our genes to future generations.
* An alternative ultimate explanation involves reciprocal altruism. This occurs when people assist one another knowing that this is likely to be reciprocated when the actor needs help in the future.

Bystander apathy

* Research into bystander behaviour was stimulated by the high-profile murder of Kitty Genovese, in which a number of neighbours reportedly failed to intervene.
* Although Genovese case was widely misreported, the principle that people in larger numbers are less likely to intervene to offer help has been upheld by experimental research.
* The probability of bystander apathy also increases where the situation is ambiguous and where those needing help are strangers, and decreases where there is physical danger and when males are present.
* Recent high-profile mass instances of bystander apathy by health professionals towards patients have spawned the term ‘compassion deficit’ describing the disposition of the carers. There are, however, situational explanations for this behaviour.

Prejudice

* A prejudice is an extreme attitude with cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Prejudices can have structural as well as individual forms and can be hostile or benevolent in their intent.
* Stereotyping is an inevitable cognitive process but can have serious consequences for the target groups involved. Stereotypes can include positive and negative characteristics and can be thought of as having two dimensions, competence and warmth.
* Humans have a tendency for bias in favour of their own social categories and against members of different social categories. This is exacerbated by competition and can be tackled by the pursuit of shared goals.
* Even those who reject group stereotypes and deny conscious bias may have implicit prejudice, unconscious bias towards particular social categories. However the standard tool for measuring implicit bias, the IAT, is controversial.
* There may be an existential aspect to prejudice as we boost our own self-esteem and cultural identity at the expense of others in order to help manage the terror of our own mortality.

Aggression

* Aggression involves the attempt to harm another person by carrying out an act in the knowledge that it will be harmful and against the wishes of the person.
* There are important distinctions between aggression and violence, between hostile and instrumental aggression and between real and ritual violence.
* There are sex differences in aggression, with males responsible for more direct or physical aggression than females.
* There are a range of factors affecting aggression including frustration and observational learning. The general aggression model takes into account a range of external factors, including frustration and provocation, and internal factors such as personality, sex, and decision-making.
* In keeping with what we know about self-serving bias, it appears that people find ways to justify their aggression.
* Intergroup conflict accounts for much large-scale aggression. This is characterized by dehumanization and deindividuation.