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## Social Psychology in the Film 12 Angry Men

The film 12 Angry Men is a story about a jury trying to come to a verdict on a murder case. The case involves a young boy who has been accused of murdering his father. Initially, all the jurors agree that the boy is guilty, however one of them is unsure. Throughout the movie, this one man brings up enough reasonable doubt for the entire jury to one by one change their vote to not guilty so that eventually the young boy is acquitted. There are many aspects of social psychology seen in this movie, specifically seen with faulty eyewitness testimony, similar juror characteristics, and prejudice through subtyping.

In the book Intro to Social Psychology by David Myers, it is clear that throughout time social psychologists have come to show that eyewitness testimony cannot always be a reliable source of information. However, the research shows that juries are likely to believe the eyewitness more likely than not, even after they have been discredited. This is seen in the film 12 Angry Men multiple times. At first, when the jurors each go around the table and say why they think the boy is guilty, most of them bring up the eyewitness testimonies. There are two eyewitness testimonies that are the subject of discussion, one from the old man who lived below the murder and one from the lady who lived across the street. After the men who are voting not guilty show some serious holes in the old man's testimony, there are only a few jurors left who think the boy is guilty. When they are asked why, they go to the woman's testimony, where she said she saw the boy and you cannot just throw that out. Even though there has been so much evidence to this point to show that the boy probably did not kill his father, these eyewitness testimonies were strong enough to have the men ignore other evidence and rely purely on the words of someone else to throw a man into jail.

Another aspect of social psychology seen in the film is juror characteristics. These twelve men are all quite different from each other, and each of their differences leads them to view the case in a different light. In David Myer's book, we learn that jurors are more likely to be on the side of the defendant if the defendant is similar to the juror. This is true in other aspects of social psychology as well, such as liking, prejudice, and conformity. In the film this is seen after one juror makes a prejudiced remark of how the boy grew up in the slums. The man is saying that of course the kid did it because of his upbringing. This really upsets another juror who actually did grow up in the slums. This juror who grew up in the slums stands up for the boy saying that just because he grew up in the slums does not mean he is a murderer. Shortly after this, he changes his vote to not guilty, since he sees his own struggles in the boy at this point.

Another aspect of social psychology seen with this particular scene is subtyping. After the man who grew up in the slums is offended by the man who is stereotyping kids from the slums, the

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offending man says that of course he should not take it that way, because this man on the jury is obviously different from the defendant. This is an example of subtyping, which is when someone does not fit the stereotype someone has in their mind, so they just tell themselves that that person is an exception to the rule. This is a form of prejudice, where the person refuses to accept that their stereotype is wrong, but instead just see this one person as an odd example. This is definitely seen in the movie, because even after this offensive event, the fact that this boy grew up in the slums is still a point held against him.

Overall, the film 12 Angry Men shows many different aspects of social psychology during its plot line. Specifically, it shows different faults that can happen in a courtroom that can be easily overlooked. If that one man chose to conform and vote guilty with the rest of the men on the first vote, then the boy would have gone to jail when he was actually innocent. The importance of actually analyzing an eyewitness testimony is exemplified very well as both of the testimonies this jury heard seems to be faulty. The strength of juror similarities to the defendant is seen as one man completely changes his vote once he realizes how much he has in common with the defendant. Finally, the aspect of subtyping in prejudice is portrayed quite well in the film as the men still judge the boy for his upbringing, but do not think any different of the man in the jury who was brought up the same way. Overall, 12 Angry Men is a great portrayal of aspects of social psychology and could be studied much more with many other social processes.

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