



LECTURE 3: SOCIAL PERCEPTION



PART 1: ATTITUDES

“A learned predisposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way.”

Allport (1954)

“A person’s evaluation of any psychological object.”

Azjen & Fishbein (1980)

- **Allport's** definition captures several points that social psychologists would generally agree on regarding attitudes:
 - They result from past experience;
 - They encompass a range of processes including thinking, feeling and acting;
 - The psychological aspects of attitudes incline people to behave in particular ways towards particular people or things
- **Allport** and others would add to this that attitudes persist over time (if you had an attitude towards sports last week you are likely to still have it next week) and that they are relatively stable (unless affected by some other process or event,
- **Your attitude towards sport – favourable or unfavourable – will likely be the same next week as it was last week)**

STRUCTURE OF ATTITUDES

- Following Allport's (1954) definition, most social psychologists agree that attitudes have three distinct but inter-related components:
- The **cognitive** component: this is what people think about the attitude object;
- The **affective** (or emotional) component: this is what people feel about the attitude object;
- The **behavioural** component: this is how people act towards the attitude object.

A

Affective

B

Behavioural

C

Cognitive

FUNCTION OF ATTITUDES

- ✖ Attitudes mediate between inner needs and the outside world
- ✖ Katz (1960); four functions of attitudes:
 - + Adaptive
 - + Knowledge
 - + Value-expressive
 - + Ego-defensive



1: ADAPTIVE FUNCTION



- ✖ Help people **achieve goals, avoid bad things** e.g.
- ✖ Holding/expressing of certain attitudes may bring about direct rewards: a young child whose parent holds strong attitudes about football might learn that expressing support for, say, Aston Villa (or distain for Birmingham City) brings parental approval.
- ✖ Alternately, some attitudes allow a person access to rewards, as when expressing liking for particular music or ways of dressing allows some adolescents to join particular social groups and obtain the benefits of group membership. Furthermore, expressing other attitudes may help some people avoid negative circumstances.

2: KNOWLEDGE FUNCTION

- ✖ Help structure & organise our understanding people & world e.g.
- ✖ Some attitudes are useful because they help to **make the world more understandable**. They help people ascribe causes to events and direct attention towards features of people or situations that are likely to be useful in making sense of them.
- ✖ Stereotyping is an example of the knowledge function of attitudes. Stereotypes are **mental structures that allow us to predict the characteristics a person** will have based on the group they belong to. Using stereotypes to make sense of people is quick and requires minimal mental effort.

KEY RESEARCH:

- ✖ Martin & Halverson (1983) showed 5 and 6 year-old children a series of images that either fitted their gender stereotypes (e.g. a girl playing with a doll) or conflicted with them (e.g. a girl playing with a gun). One week later, the children were asked to describe the images they had been shown and to say how confident they were in what they remembered.
 - + Gender-consistent images were remembered more confidently
 - + Gender inconsistent images were misremembered to make them consistent



3: VALUE EXPRESSIVE FUNCTION

- ✖ Help us express ourselves and communicate with others e.g.

Some attitudes are important to a person because they express **values that are integral to that person's self concept** (i.e. their ideas about who they are). The attitude is, consequently, 'part of who they are' and the expression of that attitude communicates important things about that person to others.

4: EGO DEFENSIVE FUNCTION

- ✗ Help to **protect us from psychological harm** e.g.
- ✗ Some attitudes serve to protect the person that holds them from psychologically damaging events or information by allowing them to be recast in less damaging or threatening ways. This inevitably may involve a degree of bias or distortion in the way the world is interpreted but people will readily do this in order to preserve a particular (usually favourable) view of themselves or the world.



KEY STUDY: LAPIERE`S STUDY

- In the early 1930s, attitudes towards Chinese people in the United States were rather negative and Chinese people encountered a great deal of prejudice. From 1930 to 1932, a social psychologist called Richard LaPiere spent considerable time traveling through the US accompanied by a young Chinese student and his wife. They visited a large number of restaurants, cafes, hotels and motels (251 establishments in all).



- However, LaPiere was surprised to find that they were refused service only once and, when they received any additional attention it was 'generally positive' (Erwin, 2001).

- ✖ Six months later, LaPiere sent a questionnaire to all of the establishments they had visited on their travels, including the question, 'will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?'
- ✖ He obtained 128 replies. In response to the critical question 92 per cent of the restaurants and 91 per cent of the hotels/motels reported that they would not accept Chinese customers. The majority of the remainder reported that they were uncertain whether they would and that it would depend on circumstances.
- ✖ LaPiere's study is often cited as evidence that there is little or no relationship between attitudes and behaviour.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

✖ Theories of attitude change:

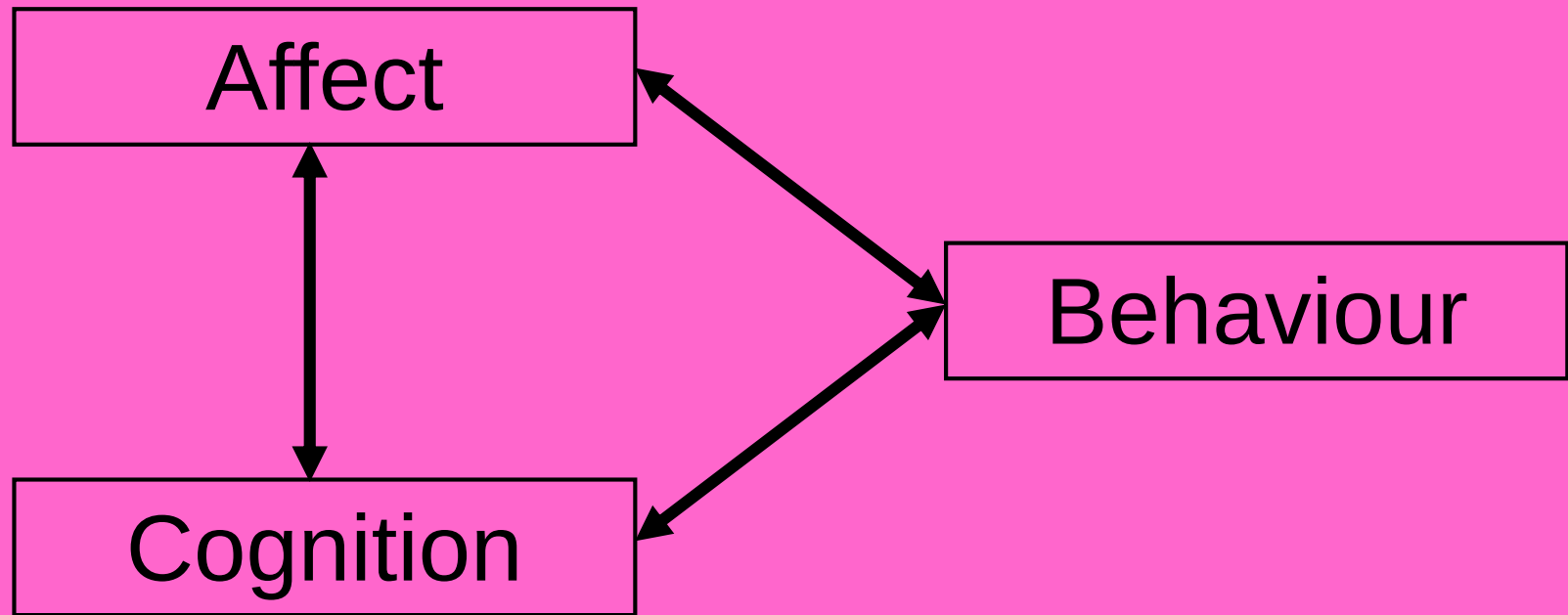
+ Cognitive dissonance



+ Persuasive communication:

+ Dual-process theory:

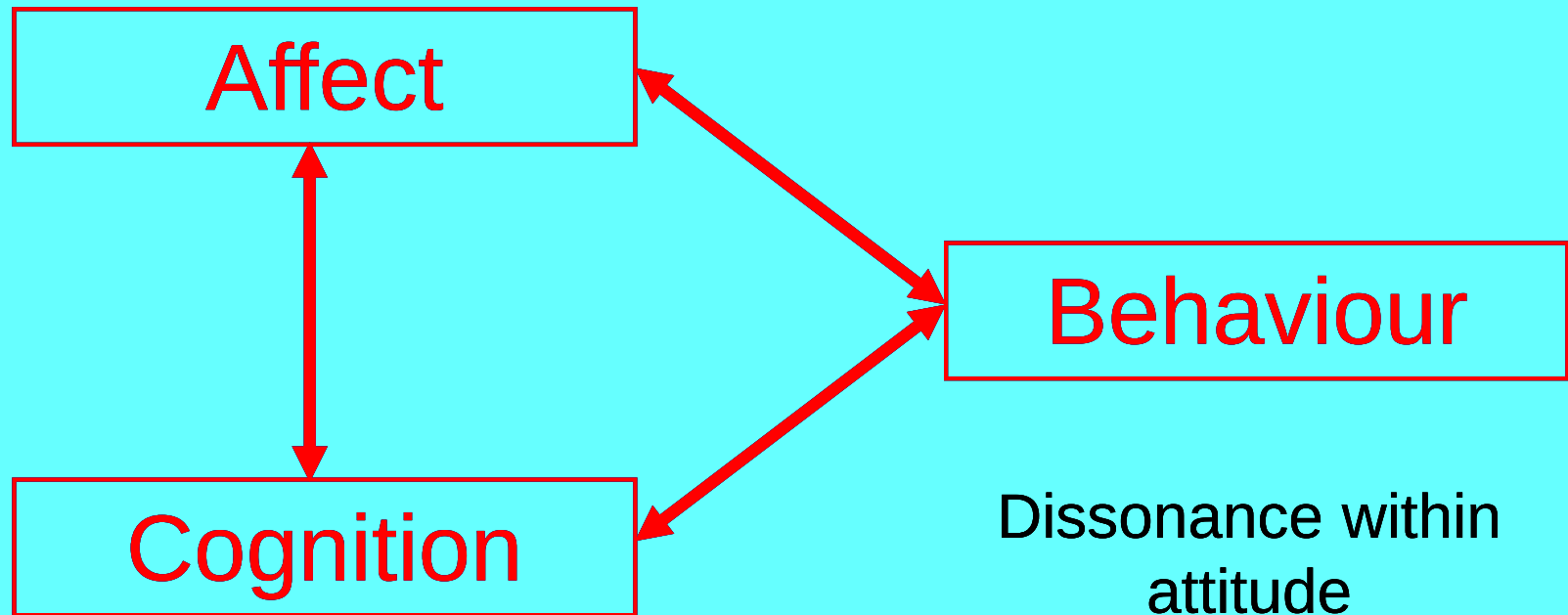
CONSISTENCY PRINCIPLE



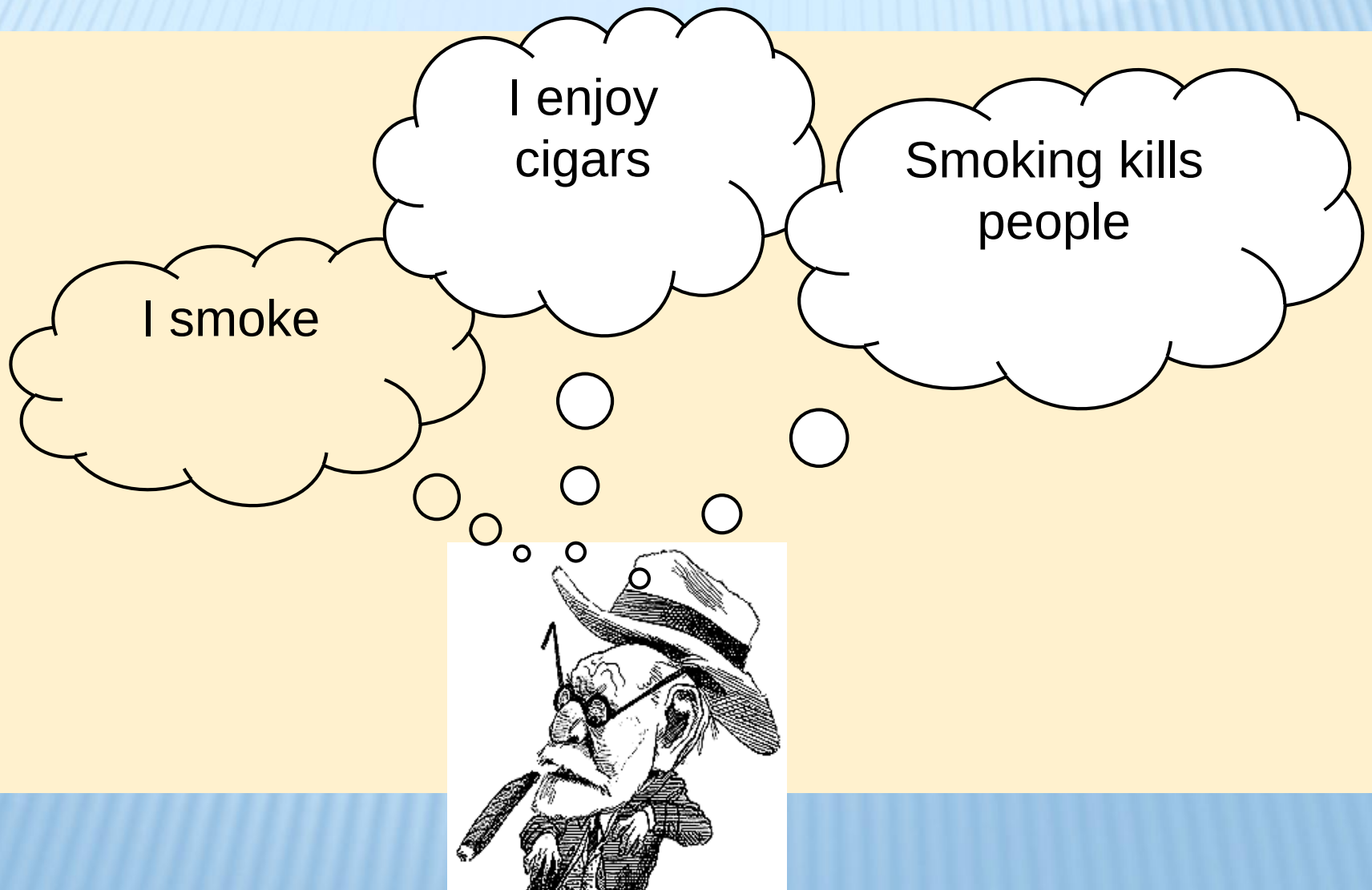
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

- ✖ Based on the consistency principle
- ✖ Dissonance (negative state from two cognitions in disagreement)
- ✖ Attitude change occurs when a person has a need to reduce the dissonance between:
 - + Different aspects of same attitude.
 - + Different attitudes.
 - + Attitude & behaviour. e.g. thinking smoking is bad, but still doing it.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE



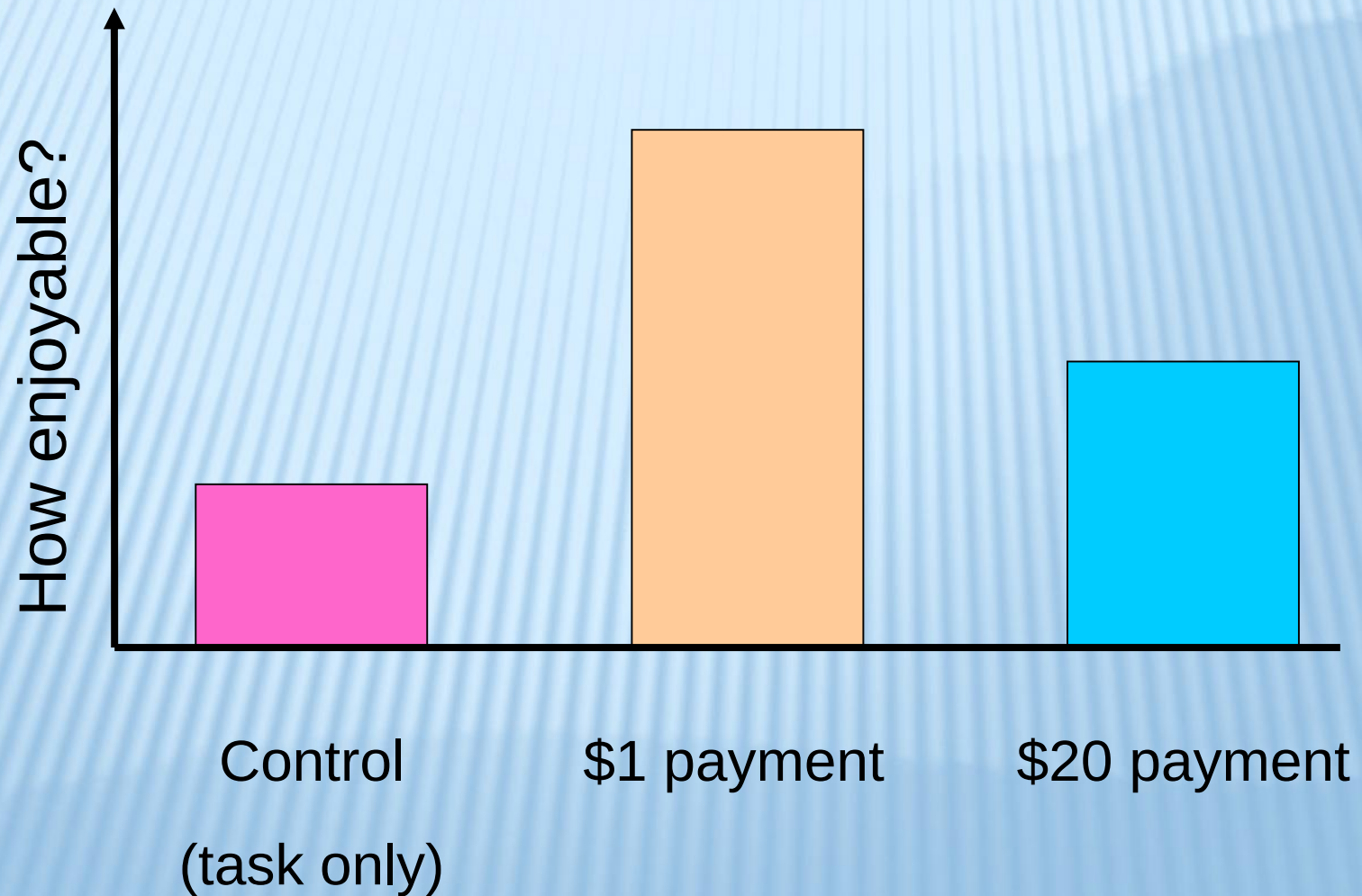
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE



COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

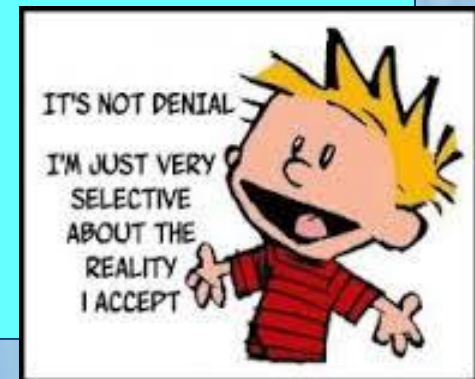
- ✖ Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)
 - + PPs spent some time doing a tedious task; were then offered either \$1 or \$20 to tell another PP it was interesting & enjoyable
 - + PPs were later asked to rate how enjoyable the task had been
- ✖ How do you think the ratings might differ between the \$1 and \$20 conditions?

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE



CONDITIONS FOR DISSONANCE (COOPER & FAZIO 1984)

- ✖ Awareness of inconsistency and the negative consequences
- ✖ The person must assume responsibility for the behaviour
- ✖ Physiological arousal must be present and it must be unpleasant (essay study: Elliot & Devine 1994)
- ✖ Must attribute dissonance to the correct inconsistency



PART 2: PERSUASION.



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WHAT IS PERSUASION?

- ✖ Changing someone`s mind (attitude) via an **external** message.
- ✖ How can we change people`s minds by persuading them to see our side of the argument?
- ✖ How do advertisements work for holidays, diets, health supplements etc?

Four components to persuasion:

1. who presents the information? (**source**)
2. what is the **content** of the message?
3. to **whom** is the message intended?
4. what **channel** is used: how is the message communicated?

WHO PRESENTS THE INFORMATION? WHO IS THE SOURCE?

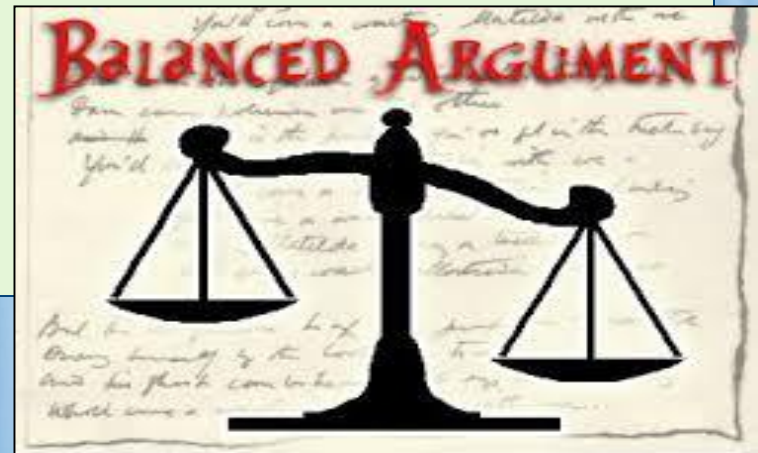
A credible, trustworthy and sincere individual, especially if they appear to have nothing personal to gain. If it is perceived that they are trying to impress, then it is less convincing.

Experts must be compatible with the topic area or persuasion does not work.

- ✗ The **sleeper effect** refers to when we recognise a face or a name, but cannot recall where from. The effects of a particular message increase with time, but we cannot remember the source (Jacoby et al 1989).
- ✗ One explanation for this is the **discounting cue hypothesis**. Because the source may be considered untrustworthy, you discount the message, but over time the connections between the source and the message are weakened and you only remember the message.

WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE?

- ✖ Both positive and negative aspects of the message should be presented, followed by refuting the negative aspects.
- ✖ Unless, the audience has a strong belief in an issue, then two sided messages are not effective.
- ✖ The **primacy recency** effect has been found to occur when both sides of an argument are presented. If both sides are presented one immediately following the other, the primacy effect occurs. If there is a delay however, the recency effect occurs (Wilson & Miller 1968).
- ✖ Should it be rational or emotional?



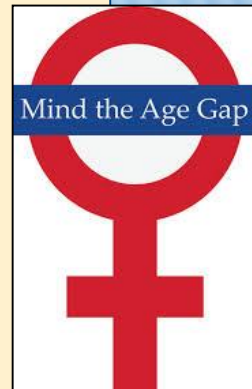
- ✖ Attitudes that we hold have both affective (emotional) and cognitive (belief-rational) components, which is most important when trying to persuade someone?
- ✖ Edwards (1990) gave half of pp`s a drink to taste, then informed them regarding its health benefits. The other half of pp`s received the information about the benefits first, then tasted the drink.
- ✖ Edwards found that the primacy effect worked on both conditions: if pp`s tasted first their feelings (affect) changed, if they read the information first, their cognitions (beliefs) changed!



TO WHOM IS THE MESSAGE INTENDED FOR?

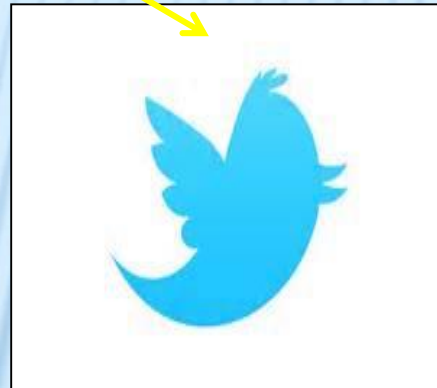
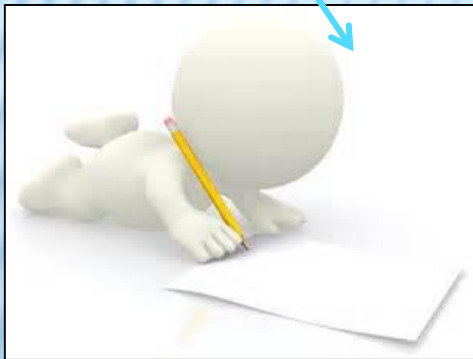
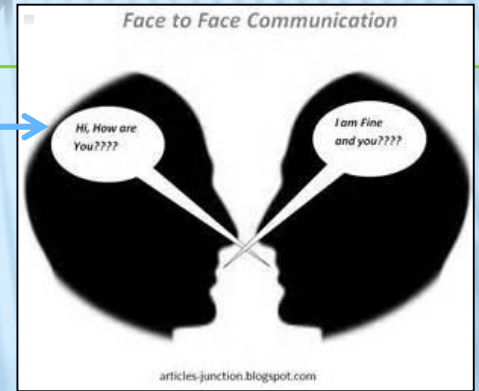
- ✗ Does the personality of the individual matter?
- ✗ **No! not really...**
- ✗ Does the gender of the individual matter?
- ✗ **No! not really...**
- ✗ What about age?
- ✗ Mixed results, younger individuals are more susceptible to persuasion by images...

(Covell, Dion & Dion 1994)



THE CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION:

- ✖ Face to face
- ✖ Email
- ✖ Twitter
- ✖ Written

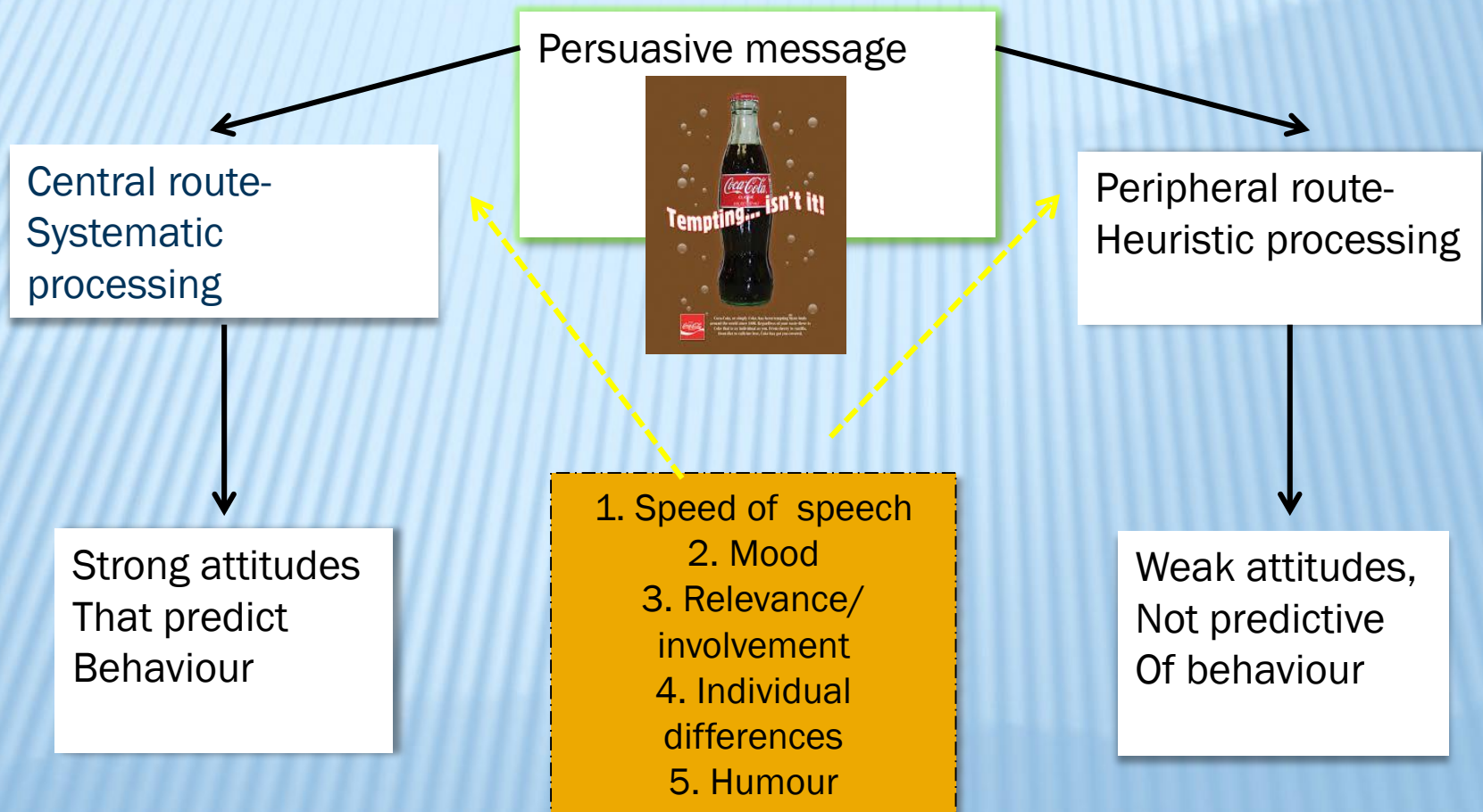


- ✖ Findings are inconsistent, because it depends on the difficulty of the message. Difficult messages were more persuasive when written, the easier ones more persuasive when in audio or visual format (Chaiken & Eagly 1974)

DUAL PROCESS MODELS OF PERSUASION: HOW THEY WORK.

- ✗ Two influential models:
- ✗ **Elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo 1986).**
- ✗ **Heuristic systematic model (Chaiken 1980)**
- ✗ Both models are very similar - there are two potential routes to persuasion and attitude change:
- ✗ **Central-** when we are motivated to think in detail and we are strongly influenced by the strength and quality of an argument.
- ✗ **Peripheral-** when we are not able to, or will not analyse the message content, we therefore pay attention to irrelevant or unimportant cues such as attractiveness.

SYSTEMATIC VERSUS HEURISTIC PROCESSING OF ATTITUDE CHANGE.



WHAT DETERMINES WHICH ROUTE WE TAKE?

- ✖ 1. **rapid speech**- hard to process, therefore we would opt for peripheral processing and rely on the number of arguments..
- ✖ 2. **mood**- happy people go for the peripheral route, and negative people go for the central route. Why? Negative moods signal that something is wrong and prompts more attention to be paid.
- ✖ 3. **involvement/relevance** to self- more important, more likely to be central.
- ✖ 4. **individual differences**- some individuals have a high need for cognition (Haugtvedt & Petty 1992). Additionally others have a high need for closure, or a high need to evaluate.
- ✖ 5. **humour**- if humour is message relevant people opt for the central route, if it is irrelevant to the message, we use the peripheral route.

ONCE A ROUTE IS TAKEN, WHAT DETERMINES ITS EFFECTIVENESS?

- ✖ Central route- key determinant is the argument quality
- ✖ Peripheral route- many factors:
 - ✖ Physical attractiveness (Chaiken 1979)
 - ✖ Similarity to ourselves, appearance, attitudes social categories, etc.
 - ✖ Source credibility.



Attitudes summarize beliefs, feelings and past behaviour regarding attitude objects – they can also predict behaviour

Attribution theory concerns itself with the processes by which we use causal explanations for everyday events and behaviour in an effort to understand and make sense of the social world;

PART 3: ATTRIBUTION

Impression formation (Immediate)

- A cognitive representation, a constructed representation of reality, stored in memory which indicates what you think the person is really like
- These are concepts that are accessible,; either concurrently active concepts or recently active concepts
- Priming occurs when concept has been used, even in unrelated context, and frequency of use occurs too. (CIT- Jones & Davis 1965)

Systematic processing at a superficial level

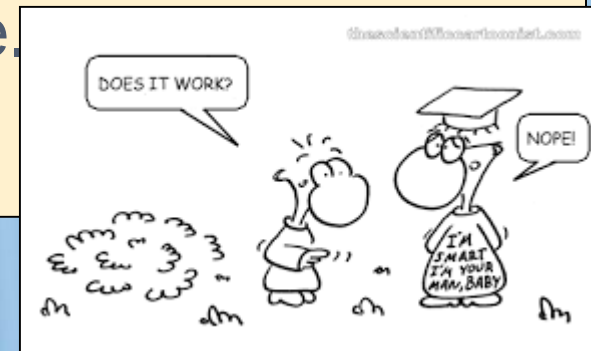
- You are unlikely to change your representations

Systematic processing more deeply via motivation and ability

- Accessible and Salient information- Taylor and Fiske (1975) arranged seating while observers watched a two-person conversation.
- Pp`s attributed greater causal role to person they directly faced

NAÏVE SCIENTIST APPROACH

- ✖ We are prone to over relying on intentions as explanations (Heider & Simmel, 1944)
Ordinary people are rational, scientific thinkers who make causal attributions using similar processes as scientists (Heider, 1958)
- ✖ They seek parsimonious explanations for complex social puzzles
- ✖ People make external attributions (e.g., social pressure) and internal attributions (e.g., personality) for behaviours



CORRESPONDENCE INFERENCE THEORY

- ✖ People attempt to infer whether a person's action is caused by internal dispositions (Jones & Davis, 1965)
- ✖ They do this by making correspondent inferences based on
 - ✖ the extent the person had a choice to engage in the action
 - ✖ whether the behaviour is expected
 - ✖ what the intended consequences of the action might be

CO VARIATION MODEL

- ✖ People typically attribute the cause of a behaviour to a factor which covaries most clearly with the behaviour (Kelley, 1967)
- ✖ Co-variation principle
- ✖ The attribution of events to conditions that tend to be present when the event happens and absent when it does not
- ✖ Three dimensions of information about covariance
- ✖ Consensus, distinctiveness, consistency
- ✖ If there is no relationship between a specific cause and behaviour, the cause is discounted in favour of another

Consensus

- Does **everyone** show the same behaviour in that particular situation

Consistency

- Does **`that person`** always behave in the same way in that particular situation

Distinctiveness

- Does **`that person`** always behave in the same way any other similar situations

EXTENDING KELLY`S MODEL

- ✖ Improved analysis of covariation between events, persons, stimuli and occasions
- ✖ People appear to over attribute events to the person when they have incomplete information (McArthur, 1972)
- ✖ E.g., does Mike swear more than other people in general?
- ✖ When people have complete information, they follow the covariation principle without systematic errors (e.g., Cheng & Novick, 1990)

EXTENDING KELLEY'S NAÏVE SCIENTIST APPROACH

- Beyond the covariation principle
 - People are more likely to make an attribution for a factor (e.g., Mike) when they know there are no 'third causes', that could be responsible for the covariation with the behaviour (e.g., swearing)
 - Only under these conditions will they grant causal power to Mike (Cheng, 1997)
 - Also, is there a causal mechanism for A to cause B? (Ahn et al., 1995)

TWO FAMOUS 'ERRORS' IN ATTRIBUTION

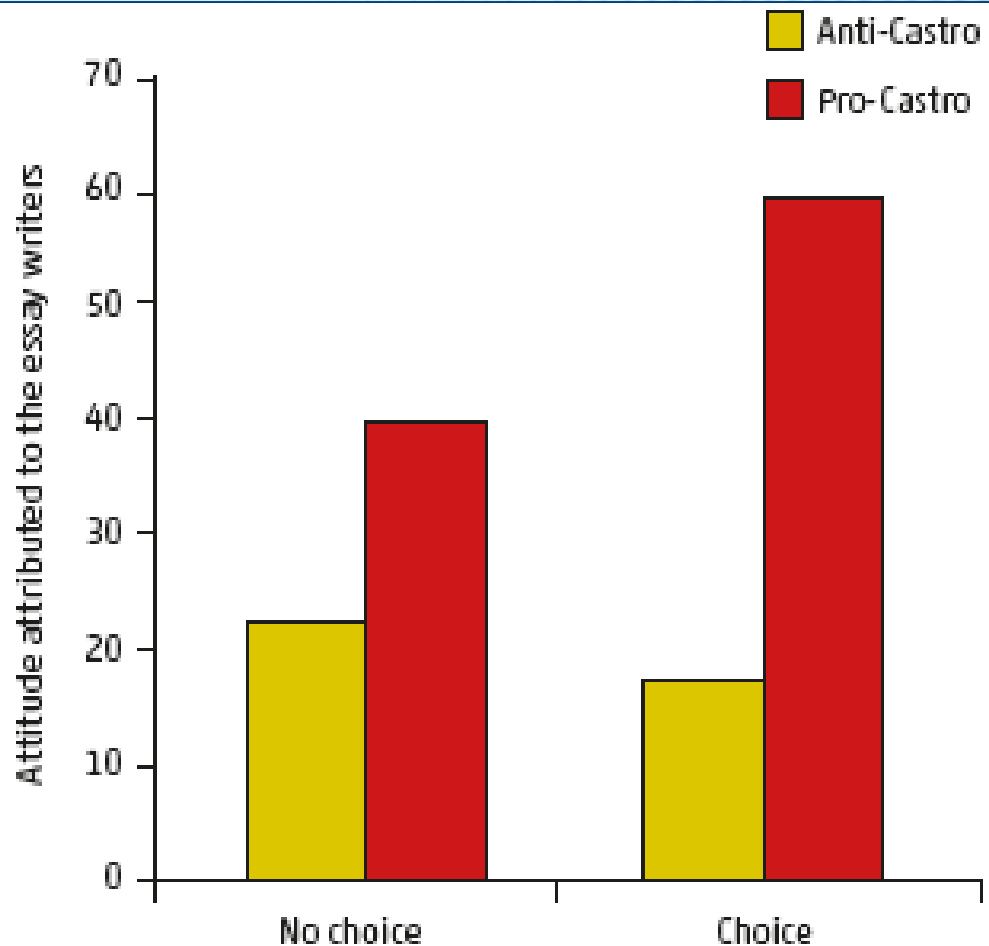
- ✖ Fundamental attribution error (correspondence bias)
 - + Tendency to attribute behaviour to the person when there is insufficient evidence to do so and there is evidence that something about the situation may have caused the behaviour (Jones, 1979)
 - + Jones and Harris- figure 3.4 on next slide
 - + Stronger in Western cultures (Nisbett et al., 2001)
 - + Reduced with time, concentration, information and motivation (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995)

TWO FAMOUS 'ERRORS' IN ATTRIBUTION

FIGURE 3.4 Demonstration of correspondence bias

Participants who freely chose to write a pro- or anti-Castro essay were attributed with pro- or anti-Castro attitudes respectively. Unexpectedly, the same pattern emerged even when the essay writers had no choice. This demonstrates the correspondence bias - the tendency for people to attribute behaviours to underlying dispositions.

Source: Data from Jones and Harris, 1967



TWO FAMOUS 'ERRORS' IN ATTRIBUTION

- ✖ Actor-observer bias (Malle, 2006)
 - + Tendency for actors to attribute their own behaviours to the situation and for observers to explain behaviours in terms of personality traits
 - + Enhanced by valence of behaviour (Malle, 2006)

FIGURE 3.5 The actor-observer effect Storms (1973) demonstrated that when participants watch themselves from another person's perspective, they are more likely to make a dispositional inference, thus reversing the actor-observer effect.



Participant has a videoed conversation with another student

Participant watches a video of the conversation and is asked to make an attribution for their behaviour

From one's own perspective

From the other student's perspective

Dispositional and situational attributions

Dispositional attributions

OTHER BIASES AND ERRORS

- People are motivated tacticians, tending to use cognitive shortcuts (heuristics) to make attributions, so can be characterised as 'cognitive misers' (Nisbett & Ross, 1980)
- Choice of shortcut is often influenced by personal motivations and self-serving tendencies
 - Self-serving attribution bias (Arkin et al., 1980)
 - Unrealistic optimism (Lerner et al., 2003)
 - Illusion of control (Langer, 1975)
 - False consensus effect (Ross et al., 1977)
 - False uniqueness effect (Ehrlinger et al., 2005)

APPLICATIONS OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

- Mental health
 - People with depression tend to have an 'attributional style' (Abramson et al., 1989)
 - Attribute negative events in their lives as internal, global and stable
 - Psychotherapeutic techniques focus on training people to stop this way of thinking (Beck et al., 1979)



APPLICATIONS OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

- Aggression



- Aggressive people are prone to the hostile attribution bias, seeing innocent acts of other people as intentional provocation (Orobio de Castro et al., 2002)
- If children aged five are predisposed to interpret behaviours in this way, they are more likely to be aggressive 12 years later (Lansford et al., 2006)

APPLICATIONS OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

- Emotions
 - Attributing anxiety to external factors rather than internal factors should reduce anxiety about the self (Valins & Nisbett, 1971)
 - ... But short-lived success (Parkinson, 1985)
- Close relationships
 - People attribute partner's behaviours to internal factors are less forgiving and less satisfied with their marriage (Fincham et al., 2002)



APPLICATIONS OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY (CONT.)

- Intergroup relations
 - Intergroup attributions tend to be characterised by ethnocentrism
 - Known as the ultimate attribution error (Hewstone & Jaspers, 1982)
- Educational achievement
 - Training people to explain their educational performance in terms of changeable factors leads to favourable results (e.g., Haynes et al., 2008)



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