



Introduction to the module

Causal Attribution

Module Schedule

1	Module Overview Social Cognition - Causal Attribution	
2	Self & Identity	
3	Attitudes and Attitude Change	
4	Social Influence	
5	Pro-social Behaviour	
6	Verbal and Non-verbal Communication	
7	Aggression	
8	Prejudice and Discrimination	
9	Relationships	
10	Group Dynamics Decision making and Leadership	

Assessment

Essay: 2,000 words (50%)

Title: ‘Critically evaluate the contributions of Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory and Turner’s self-categorisation theory to explaining the development and maintenance of social identities.’

Submission Date/Time: 4th March 2025 by 23.59

For the essay:

- Do not merely repeat lecture material
- Provide evidence of an independent and appropriate literature search
- Use examples from peer-reviewed sources
- Include appropriate application of theory/models and emoricial research to answer the question
- Evaluation – is X a good model/study? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Which can best contribute to explain culture and self-identity?

2-hour Seen Exam: Answer two questions from a choice of four (50%)

Questions to be made available 3 weeks prior to the examination date

Social and Cultural Psychology

- **Social Psychologists**

Study how social roles, attitudes, relationships and groups influence people to do things, or do things in a way that they would not necessarily do on their own

- **Cultural Psychologists**

Study the origins of roles, attitudes and group norms in people's ethnic, regional and national communities

- **Sociocultural Psychologists**

Study the ways in which communities and identities provide the cultural resources that can influence individuals' ways of making sense of the world and their behaviours

What is social psychology?

Social influence – how we are all influenced by other people (real or imagined)

Social cognition – how we think about the social world

Social perception – how we make sense of other people

Social influence – how we are all influenced by other people (real or imagined)

Self-knowledge – how we come to understand ourselves through the social world

Social influence

We are all influenced by other people

Examples of social influence?

- **Direct or deliberate** social influence – persuasion

Advertising - BUY!

Election campaigns - VOTE!

Charity appeals - GIVE!

Personal persuasion - DO!
- DO NOT!



The advertisement features a photograph of a person sitting amidst a large pile of rubble and debris, likely the aftermath of a disaster. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts. The background is filled with broken wood, metal, and other debris.

**Jewish Aid Australia
Haiti Appeal**

**100 000 People Dead
Millions Suffering**

Support Haitians in their time of need!

Donations are tax deductible and will be sent to Care Australia's relief and rescue mission on behalf of the Australian Jewish community.

Thousands of dollars already raised.

Donate now at www.jewishaid.org.au
or call (03) 9500 2206

jewishaid
australia

"To save one life is as if you have saved the world." Talmud

Social Influence

Social influence:

- Involves our thoughts and feelings, as well as our behaviour
- Takes on **more forms** than deliberate persuasion

Influence - mere presence of others

Is presence always necessary for influence to occur?

We 'carry' observers/evaluators/judges around with us – our behaviour?



Social and cultural context

Behaviour - shaped by social environment

Social psychology:

The scientific study of the way in which people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by the real or imagined presence of others

(Allport, 1985)

What happens in the mind of an individual when various influences come into conflict with one another?

In what ways can behaviour be affected by the presence of others?

The power of social interpretation

Social psychologists focus upon how people are influenced by their own construal of their social environment

e.g. identity, attitudes, judgements, behaviours

Is there one reality?

Or multiple realities?

We often don't make sense of events, other people and even ourselves as others do



- Social Psychologists test assumptions, ideas and hypotheses regarding human behaviour **empirically and systematically**
- **Mainstream** experimental social psychology – does not rely on
 - folk wisdom
 - common sense thinking
 - opinions of untrained people
- **Critical** social psychology - how common sense thinking and shared understandings influences the ways in which individuals make sense of their world
- Increase in qualitative psychology

Personality Psychology - different from Social Psychology

Personality psychology tries to make sense of an event in terms of the person

Strengths

Weaknesses

Problems

Personality traits

Personality psychologists:

- Emphasise character traits - such as leader/follower, bold/timid, unselfish/selfish
- Amass knowledge that maintains **expectations** about a person's character
- Use expectations to try to **predict** how specific individuals are likely think and behave

Social interaction - the process of how people act and react to others (Giddens and Duneier, 2000)

Social Relations – e.g. Loneliness and Aloneness

Social Cognition:

How do we make sense of our social world?

What is happening in this image?



Encoding social information

Bottom-up processing

Salience novelty – e.g. whisper in a silent library

Vividness intensity – e.g. bright red coat

Negative social information

- Vivid and negative stimuli more likely to be noticed
- More likely to be kept in long-term memories

Top-down processing

We bring our personal expectations to social situations – expectations, goals, attitudes, beliefs, plans, preconceptions etc.

Low effort thinking – Automatic pilot

Characteristics of automatic processing:

Rapid – routinized - very quick

Autonomous – Independent of other mental processes

Effortless –even when we're doing something else

Involuntary - Begins spontaneously and ends automatically

Unintentional –Don't have to deliberate for it to take place

Outside our awareness – We're not aware that it's happening

(e.g. Bargh, 1990; Bargh and Ferguson, 2000)

Automatic thinking with schemas

Schema – physical or mental ‘action of knowing’

Person schemas – summarise our intuitive understanding of other people – such as typical behaviours and traits

Self-schema – how we feel about ourselves

Stereotypes – relate to certain groups of people

Event schemas - determine how people perceive and behave in certain circumstances

Influence what information we notice, pay attention to, and what we remember (e.g. Bartlett, 1932, Janicik and Larrick, 2005)

Influence our memories – those that confirm, or support our schemas

Break

15 minutes



Causal Attribution

What is happening?



Causal Attribution

What is happening?

What are individuals like?

- Verbal and Nonverbal behaviour

- Implicit personality theories - Joe seems friendly so he must be sincere

- Still **substantial ambiguity** as to what a person's behaviour really means (*DePaulo, 1992*)



The nature of the attribution process

- **Heider** (1958) - father of **attribution theory**
- The study of how we infer the causes of other people's behaviour
- **Internal attribution**
 - Something about the **person** (dispositions, personality, attitudes, character)
- **External attribution**
 - something in the **situation** has caused the behaviour

Who or What was to blame?



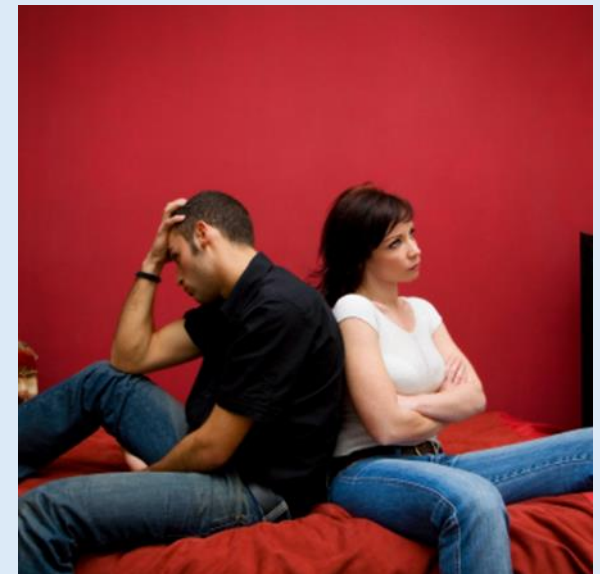
Attributions and Marriage

- Bradbury and Fincham (1991)

Men and women in happy marriages:

- **Internal attributions** for their partners positive behaviours
- **External attributions** for their negative behaviours
- Troubled marriages - the opposite
- Lack of awareness of the two patterns of attribution

(Fincham et al, 2000)



Internal / External attributions



Heider:

Tendency to **prefer** to use **internal attributions** rather than external ones

Although either type is possible in a social situation

We are perceptually focused on people

The social context might be complex, so we might overlook this

(e.g. Bargh, 1994; Miller, 1998)

Correspondent Inference Theory (Jones and Davies 1965)

How we infer whether a behaviour is due to personal characteristics or situational variables

Context of the situation in which the behaviour is occurring

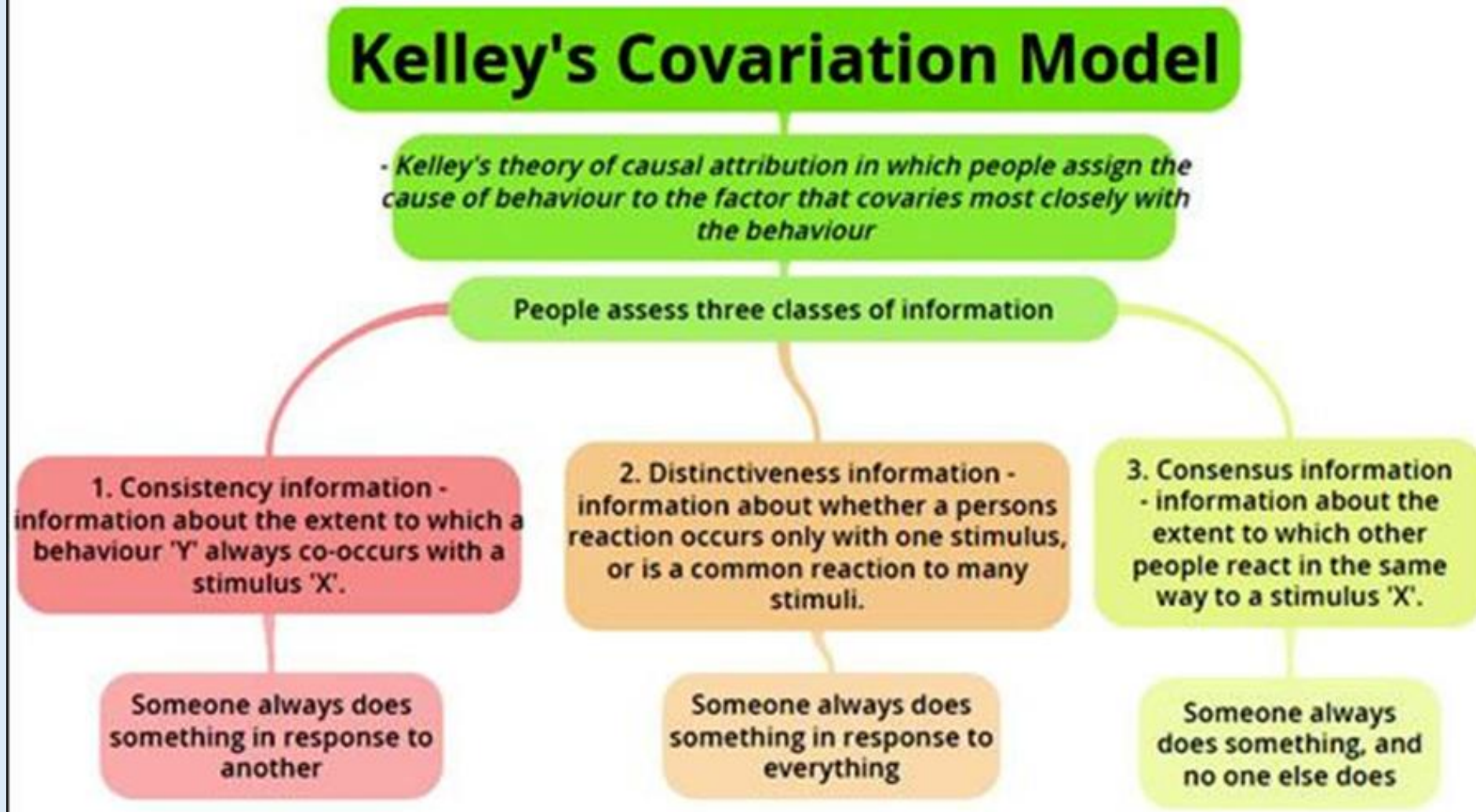
- Social desirability of the behaviour
- Behavioural freedom and restraint
- Social role
- Outcome
- Pre-existing expectations

Covariation model / ANOVA model (Kelley, 1967, 1973)

- What might determine our attribution of a person's behaviour?
- We **notice and think about more than one piece of information** when we form an impression of another person
- Examine multiple instances of behaviour, occurring at different times and in different situations
- Information used - based upon how a person's behaviour 'covaries' – how it changes across time, places, with different people, and different targets of behaviour

Kelley (1967) - three key types of information

1. Consistency
2. Distinctiveness
3. Consensus



(actor) (stimulus)
In class, a lecturer shouts at a student – John

Consensus information - how other people behave to same stimulus

– *do other people also yell at John?*

(is there consensus of behaviour?)

Distinctiveness information - how actor responds to other stimuli

– *does that lecturer shout at other students?*

(is the lecturer's behaviour distinctive to John?)

Consistency information – frequency with which observed behaviour between same actor and stimulus
occurs across time and circumstances

– *does that lecturer regularly and frequently shout at John?*

(is this a consistent occurrence with the lecturer and John?)

Covariation model (Kelley, 1967)

Internal Attribution	Consensus LOW	Distinctiveness LOW	Consistency HIGH
External Attribution	Consensus HIGH	Distinctiveness HIGH	Consistency HIGH
Particular circumstances	Consensus LOW or HIGH	Distinctiveness LOW or HIGH	Consistency LOW

Covariation model (Kelley, 1967)

Internal attribution

Consensus is **low** – it's only that lecturer that shouts at Chris

Distinctiveness is **low** – it's not just Chris she shouts at, but a lot of the students

Consistency is **high** – The lecturer shouts often at Chris

External attribution

Consensus is **high** – all the lecturers shout at Chris

Distinctiveness is **high** – the lecturer doesn't shout at other students – the behaviour is distinctive to Chris

Consistency is **high** - The lecturer shouts often at Chris

Social context

Consensus is either **low** or **high** – regardless of who else shouts at Chris

Distinctiveness is either **low** or **high** - regardless of who else the lecturer shouts at

Consistency is **low** – this is the first time that the lecturer has shouted at Chris

Assumptions of the covariation model (ANOVA model)

People make causal attributions in a rational, logical way

Studies suggest that we do often do this
(e.g. Gilbert, 1998a; Hilton, Smith and Kim, 1995; White, 2002)

Two exceptions:

- 1.** We do not use consensus information as much as Kelley's theory predicted
(e.g. Wright, Luus and Christie, 1990)
- 2.** We do not always have the relevant information we need on all three dimensions

Proceed with the attribution process using available information.

If necessary, make inferences about the missing data

(Fiedler, Walther and Nicke, 1999; Kelley, 1973)

The Correspondence Bias

e.g. Fiske and Taylor, 1991, Jones, 1979, 1990

Ramirez (2005) - 'Tribute to Rosa Parks Day'

Tendency to explain behaviour in terms of people's dispositions

- the **fundamental attribution error**

Perceptual salience

- When influence of the situation is obvious, - still make an internal attribution

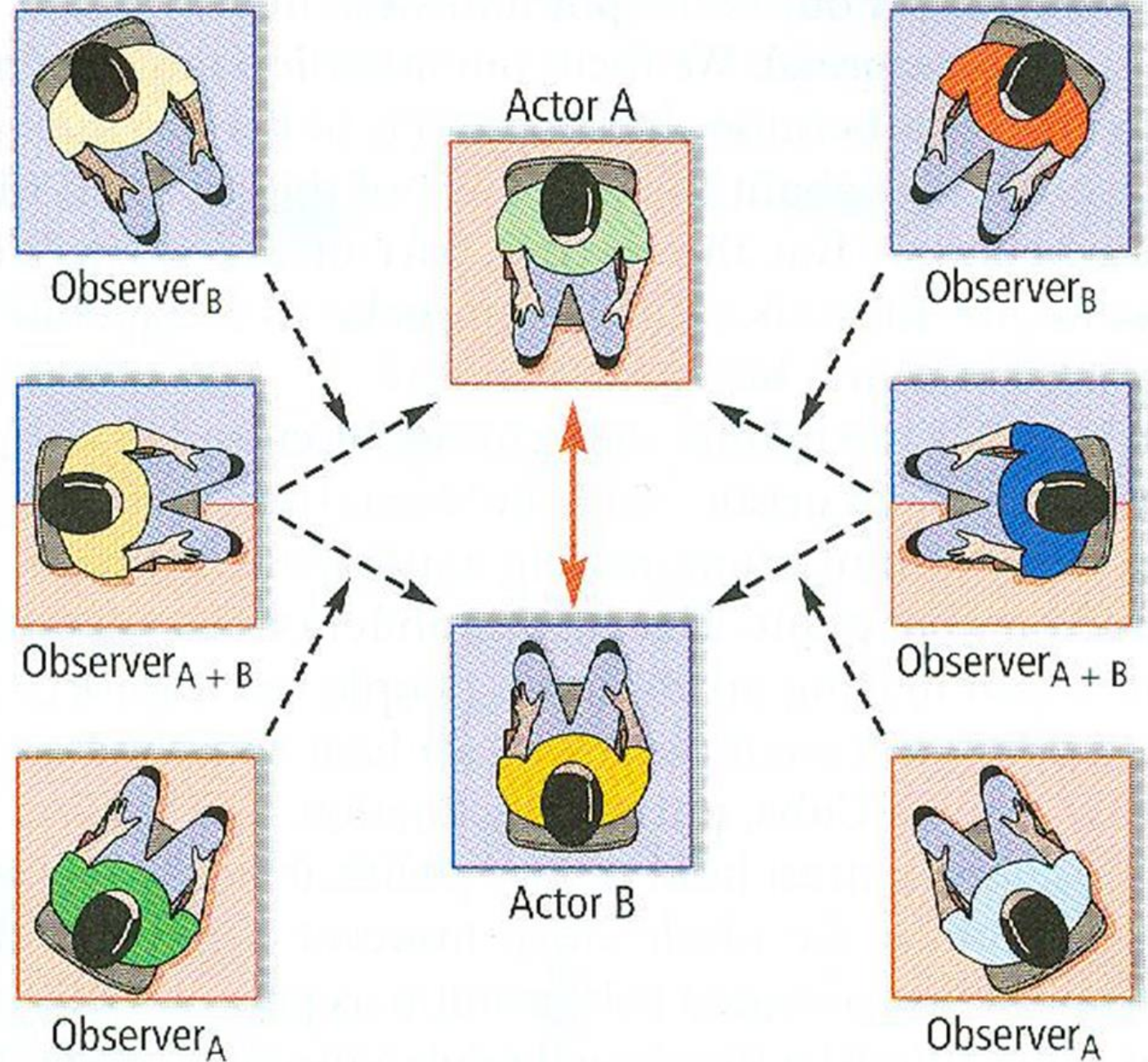
(e.g. Jones and Harris, 1967; Lord, Scott, Pugh and Desforjes, 1997)

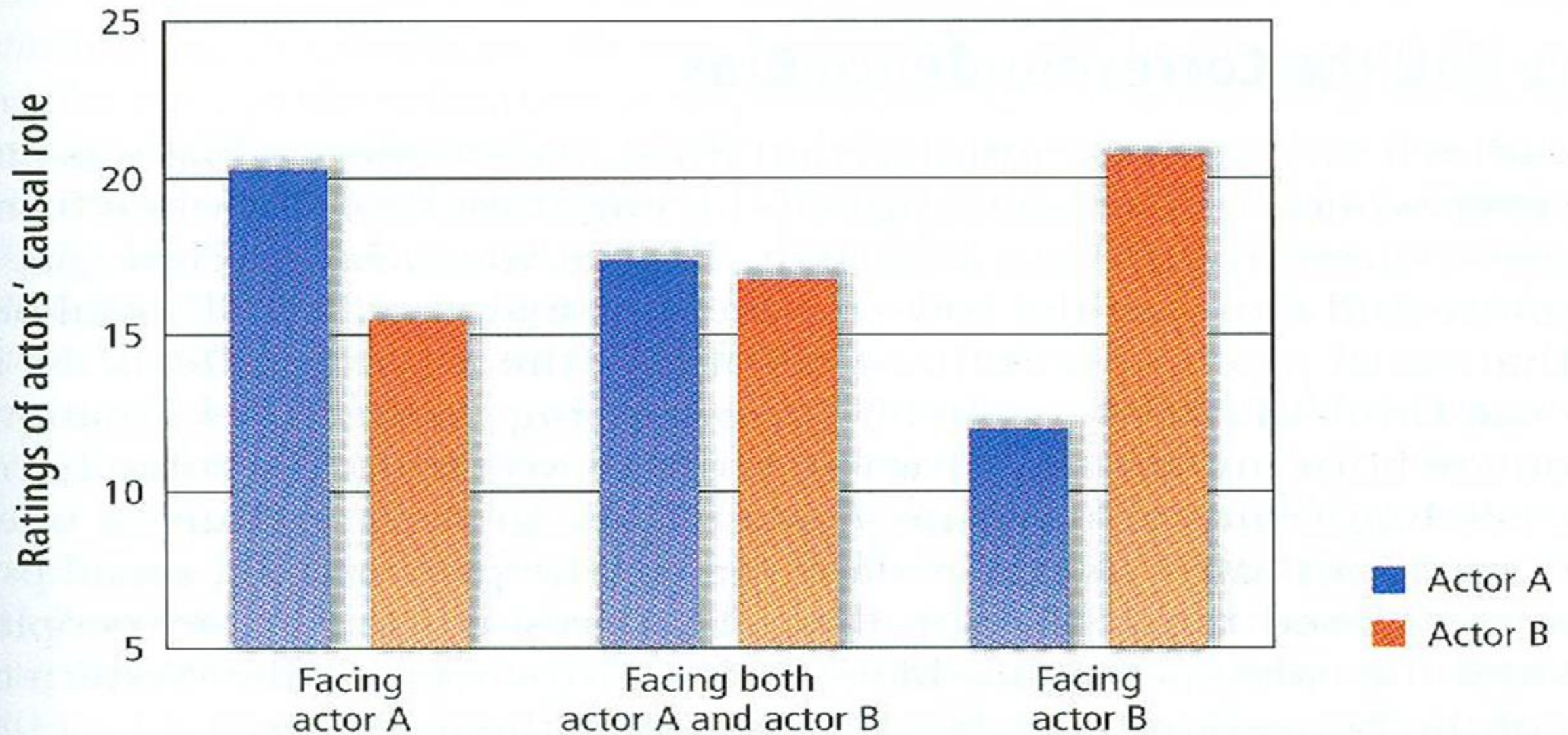
- Situational variables - often invisible to us
- Focus on the person – because they have **perceptual salience** for us

Perceptual salience

Taylor and Fiske (1975)

Classic study





Heuristics: Simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a rapid and effortless manner

- initial focus
- stick with first impressions

Taylor and Fiske (1975)

Culture and correspondence bias

Is the correspondence bias universal?

No - dependent on culture

Western cultures

- Individual, independent and self-contained
- Behaviour reflecting internal traits, motives and values
(Markus and Kitayama, 1991)
- Cultural values are based upon individual rights

East Asian cultures

- Emphasise autonomy of the group



Culture and correspondence bias

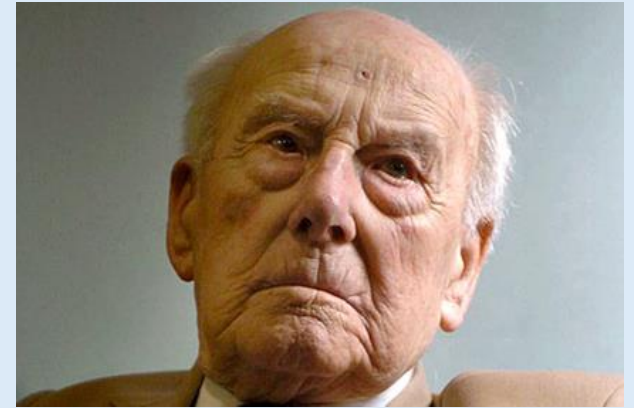
Miller (1984) - Hindus in India and Americans living in the US

Westerners were more likely to say that the causes of their friends' behaviours were **the kind of people they were**

Hindu participants preferred **situational** explanations for their own friends' behaviours

Morris and Peng (1994) – journalists in US and China – internal/external attributions in their writing about events

People in collectivist cultures DO use dispositional explanations – BUT they are more likely to go beyond this to allow for situational variables



Actor/observer difference

Correspondence bias applies unevenly

(e.g. Jones and Nisbett, 1972; Hanson, Kimble and Biers, 2001)

1. **Perceptual salience**

We notice our **own situation**, but other people are noticing **us**

2. **Information availability**

We know what our usual behaviour is like

We know what affects us and how things are likely to affect us

We detect changes in our behaviour over time and across situations

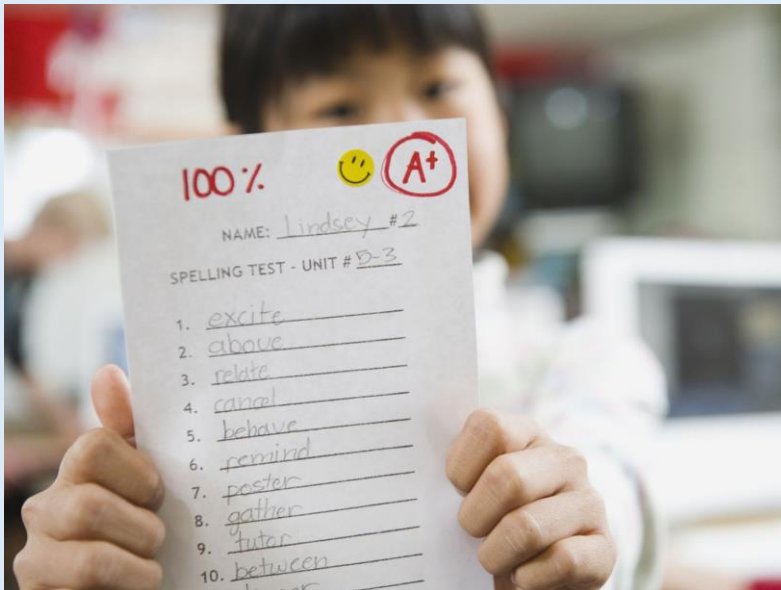
(e.g. Jones and Nisbett, 1972; Malle and Knobe, 1997)

In relation to Kelley's covariation model – actors have more distinctiveness and consistency information than observers do

Self-serving attributions

- Tendency to make:

Internal attributions for our achievements.



External attributions for our lack of achievement.



- Locus of control

Self-serving attributions in sport

Victories - athletes and coaches cite positive aspects of own teams or players

Lau and Russell (1980) - 80% of those interviewed did this

Losses - due to external causes, out of the team's control

Self-serving attributions - more common for less experienced athletes



Self-serving attributions and self-esteem

- Likely to use external attributions if not very good at something and unlikely to be able to improve

This maintains an acceptable level of self-esteem

But

- If we think that we can improve, we're more likely to be open to internal attributions – to take on board good advice

(Duval and Silvia, 2002)

Defensive attributions

We defend against feelings of vulnerability and mortality

'Bad things only happen to bad people' - or stupid people etc.

We look for the stupid mistakes or poor choices that they've made



‘Just world hypothesis’ Lerner (1980; 1998)

Tendency to blame the victim *(e.g. Walster, 1966; Burger, 1981)*

Battered wives seen as responsible for their husband’s behaviour *(Summers and Feldman, 1984)*

Assumption that people get what they deserve – and deserve what they get
(e.g. Hafer, 2000; Hafer and Begue, 2005)

This allows us to deny the level of randomness in life that we can’t predict or control

Because **we need a sense of predictability and safety**

Reading

Baron, R. A., Branscombe, N. R. (2013). *Social Psychology* (13th edition). London: Pearson. (Chapter 3)

Kassin, S., Fein, S., & Markus, H. R. (2011). *Social psychology (8th Edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (Chapter 4 – particularly 'Attribution Theories')

Also

Gross, R. (2010). *Psychology: The science of mind and behaviour (6th ed)*. London: Hodder Education. (Chapter 23)

Taylor, S. E., Peplau, L. A., Sears, D. O. (2006). *Social Psychology (12th edition)*. New Jersey: Pearson. (Chapter 2)

Kelley, H. H. (1973). The Processes of Causal Attribution. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 28(2), 107-128.

Do your **own literature search** to broaden your knowledge of this topic