

Introduction

Causal Attribution



Introduction



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

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!



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 – this affects 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



Ways of finding out why people behave the way they do

1. Ask them

Can we always provide a rationale for our own behaviour?



2. Journalism and social critique

Explanations may be unfounded, oversimplified or just wrong

3. Philosophy

Philosophers do not emphasise supporting their ideas with empirical evidence



Social Psychology is experimentally- based

Social Psychologists test assumptions, ideas and hypotheses regarding human behaviour **empirically and systematically**

Mainstream social psychology – does not rely on

folk wisdom
common sense thinking
opinions of untrained people

Critical social psychologists do focus on how common sense thinking and shared understandings influences the ways in which individuals make sense of their world

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

We will look at individual differences next year.....

What is 'Social Interaction'?

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



Social Relations

Loneliness

- A subjective discomfort when social relations lack some important feature
- Someone in a large crowd is not alone, but may still feel lonely
- **Emotional** loneliness is experienced when we lack an attachment figure
- **Social** loneliness is experienced when we lack a sense of social integration (Weiss, 1973)
- Loneliness is higher among younger people than among older people (Perlmán, 1990)

Aloneness

- A objective state of being apart from other people
- We are more likely to feel lonely when alone - but not necessarily so

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, Janick and Larrick, 2005)

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

BREAK



15 MINUTES!

Causal Attribution



What is happening?

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



- Bradbury and Fincham (1991)

Men and women in happy marriages:

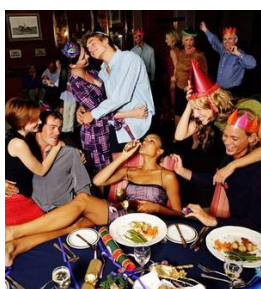
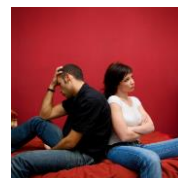
- **Internal attributions** for their partners positive behaviours

- **External attributions** for their negative behaviours

- Troubled marriages - the opposite

- Lack of awareness of the two patterns of attribution

(Fincham et al, 2000)



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. **Consensus**
2. **Distinctiveness**
3. **Consistency**

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

- Consensus** information - how other people behave to same stimulus
- *do other people also yell at Chris?* (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 Chris?)
- Consistency** information – frequently with which observed behaviour between same actor and stimulus occurs across time and circumstances
- *does that lecturer regularly and frequently shout at Chris?*
(is this a consistent occurrence with the lecturer and Chris?)

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

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

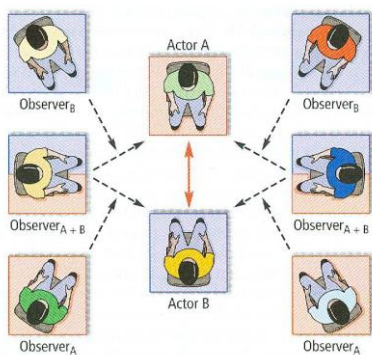
(Fiedler, Walther and Nicke, 1999; Kelley, 1973)

The Correspondence Bias

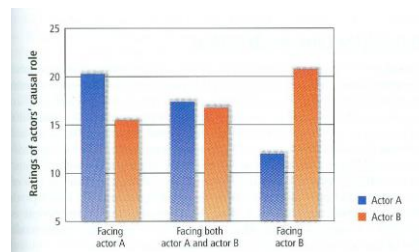
- e.g. Fiske and Taylor, 1991, Jones, 1979, 1990
- Ramirez (2005) - 'Tribute to Rosa Parks Day'
- Tendency to explain behaviour in terms of people's dispositions
- the **fundamental attribution error**

Perceptual salience

- When influence of the situation is obvious, - still make an internal attribution
 (e.g. Jones and Harris, 1967; Lord, Scott, Pugh and Desforges, 1997)
- Situational variables - often invisible to us
- Focus on the person – because they have **perceptual salience** for us



Taylor and Fiske (1975)



Taylor and Fiske (1975)

Heuristics:

- simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a rapid and effortless manner
- initial focus
- stick with first impressions

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

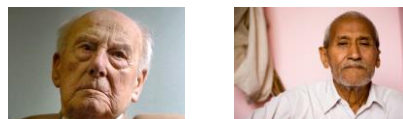
- Emphasise autonomy of the group



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

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

1. Likely to do this if not very good at something and unlikely to be able to improve

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.

Remember:

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