Social Psychology

12.1 How Do We Form Our Impressions of Others?
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- Stereotypes Are Based on Automatic Categorization
- Critical Thinking Skill: Identifying and Avoiding the Actor/Observer discrepancy
- Stereotypes can lead to Prejudice
- Cooperation can reduce Prejudice

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- Behaviors are Consistent with Strong Attitudes
- Attitudes can be Explicit or Implicit
- Discrepancies Lead to Dissonance
- Attitudes Can be Change through Persuasion
- Critical Thinking Skill: Making Sound Arguments

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- We Are Obedient to Authority

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- Love is Fostered by Idealization
- Psychology: Knowledge You Can Use: How Can Psychology Help my Romantic Relationship Thrive
- Staying in Love Can Require Work
Attributional Biases in Social Perception

Attributional biases are thinking processes people use about groups, individuals or yourself that can systematically lead to errors in perception.

- Fundamental attributional error (FAE) or called the correspondence bias
  - Just world belief (JWB) and blaming the victim
- Actor/Observer discrepancy
- Physical attractiveness stereotype (PAS)
- Self-serving bias and self-effacing bias

(Other biases and thinking strategies learned in Chapter 8: Thinking and Intelligence can affect social perception)

- fallacy of positive instances
- belief bias
- confirmation bias
- availability heuristic
- representative heuristic
Fundamental Attributional Error (FAE)

Attributions are explanations we use for why events or actions occur. Humans seem to have a desire to understand and explain why things happen. However, not all attributions are accurate and unbiased.

The fundamental attributional error is the tendency for individualistic cultures to explain other people’s behavior with the tendency to overemphasize internal, personal traits, while ignoring or underestimating the effects of external, situational factors.

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<tr>
<th>Internal and Personal characteristics</th>
<th>External and Situational Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Negative behavior</td>
<td>Tolerant reaction (proceed cautiously, allow driver a wide berth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispositional attribution “Crazy driver!”</td>
<td>Unfavorable reaction (speed up and race past the other driver, craning to give a dirty look)</td>
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</table>
In this case, members of individualistic cultures like the United States tend to focus on the person and make a dispositional attribution (Crazy driver!). While those from a more collectivist culture like Japan tend to focus on the situation and make more situational attributions (Maybe that driver is ill).
This attributional error is common when bad things happen and observers tend to blame the victim of crime, disaster such as floods, or illness.

For example:

- When people take note of ethnic neighborhoods, dominated by crime and poverty,
  - the personal qualities of the residents are blamed for these problems,
  - while other situational explanations, such as job discrimination, poor police service, etc. are downplayed.

- When one fails to get a job,
  - people can underestimate (social) situational factors such as opportunity, unemployment rates and connections and
  - overemphasize dispositional factors and label people as incompetent or lazy.

- Americans used IQ tests to demonstrate that Caucasians were more intelligent that many immigrants at the turn of the century,

- When explaining why Americans interned the Japanese during WWII, we fail to consider situational factors

- The exposure of an unborn fetus to radiation without the mothers’ knowledge. While we agree that these are unacceptable, there is a tendency to discount situational factors and public sentiment at the time.
• When talking about terrorist, we tend to make personality attributions (they are “evil”) and discount American foreign policy.

Using the fundamental attributional error, explain why a policy of “killing” terrorists is unlikely to reduce the threat of terrorism for Americans.
Why is recognizing the Fundamental Attributional Error important?

There are many factors influencing behavior. Not recognizing the fundamental attributional error (overestimating personality factors and underestimating situational factors) makes it difficult to address problems such as the following because we focus too much on the person.

- **Student’s cheating on exams:** We tend to make personality attributions and focus on the person, and not take into account social pressures to do well.
- **School Shootings:** There is a tendency to focus on the personality of the individual and not look at the social environment, such as bullying, which took Americans a long time.
- **Enron/Worldcom’s accounting practices:** There is a tendency to focus on “bad individuals”. However, there are institutional processes that reinforce an individual to manipulate the books.
- **Telemarketers:** People tend to focus on the individuals as being bad people, calling them and being annoying, and not as a person who needed to work and that was what was available.
- **Driving:** People tend to blame people for being bad drivers when they aren’t allowed to merge in and ignore situational factors (such as another car not allowing that driver to merge).
• **Drug abuse:** The root causes of drug use are partially situational. Telling someone “just say no!” is (and was) an ineffective strategy to fight drugs abuse.

• **Suicide:** We tend to focus on the personality of the person, and underestimate situation factors such as (accessibility to the means of committing suicide, the situational factors affecting the mood and cognitions).

• **Problems in Iraq:**
**Actor-observer discrepancy**

As an exception to the fundamental attributional error, there tends to be a bias in the opposite direction.

- When we are the **actor** (explaining our own behavior), we tend to attribute our own behavior to external causes.
- When we are the **observer** of someone else's behavior, we tend to attribute their behavior to internal causes.

For example

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A behavior</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Car in parking lot" /></td>
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<table>
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<th>The explanation when you are the <strong>ACTOR</strong></th>
<th>The explanation when you are the <strong>OBSERVER</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Situational explanations</td>
<td>Personality explanations</td>
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**Actor-observer discrepancy**

For example, a report comes in late.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Observer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tends to give external, situational explanations of own behavior</td>
<td>Tends to give internal, trait explanations of actor's behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I'm late with my report because other people keep asking me to help them with their projects.”</td>
<td>“He’s late with his report because he can’t concentrate on his own responsibilities.”</td>
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There is a discrepancy or bias when explaining the same behavior. Quite often these discrepancies occur over a period of time and are more difficult to detect. In addition, if we believe we are “fair” and “unbiased”, we might be motivated NOT to detect these discrepancies.

**Other Examples:**
- When I don’t know how to do my job, it is due to lack of training (the situation).
- When you don’t know how to do the job, it is incompetence (dispositional).
**Actor-observer effect**

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- When I come to the meeting unprepared and late, it is because something came up or traffic was bad.
- When you come unprepared and late, it is due to lack of interest in the job.
- When I hit you, it is because I was provoked.
- When you hit me, it is because you are aggressive.
- She’s a reckless, out-of-state driver.
- I was pressed for time.
• I forgot because of a brain fart.
• You forgot because you are incompetent.

• When I'm unemployed, it is because of a bad job market.
• When “you” are unemployed, it is because “you” are lazy.

"Why is it that if you take advantage of a corporate tax break you're a smart businessman, but if you take advantage of something so you don't go hungry, you're a moocher?"

Jon Stewart
When I leave the cell phone on in class, it was an accident. I got distracted when I normally turn it off. When other students forget to turn their cell phone off in class, it is because they are irresponsible and inconsiderate.

- When I see “kids” misbehave it is because they are “bad”. When I misbehaved as a kid, it was just something you did.
- When I use the physical attractiveness stereotype, it is because he/she was just SO attractive. When you use the physical attractiveness stereotype, it is because you are shallow.

Why does this bias occur?

What have we studied before where we are inconsistent in explaining behavior or biased in interpreting and explaining “our reality”? 
Student examples of the actor-observer discrepancy

I was driving in my car and there was a REALLY slow driver head of me who would almost turn at the intersection and then change his mind and keep going straight and who was making me crazy. What a bad driver!!!

A couple days later, I was driving in Portland and I was trying to find my friend's new house. I had the map but I couldn't find the right streets and I was driving slowly and I almost turned down the wrong street a few times and someone honked at me! It really made me angry because I'm not a bad driver, I'm just a little lost!!!
Self-serving bias and Self-effacing bias

Self-serving bias: The tendency for *individualistic* cultures to explain success with internal, personal causes, and failures with external, situational causes.

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<th>Successes</th>
<th>Failures</th>
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<td><strong>Internal, personal causes</strong></td>
<td><strong>External, situational causes</strong></td>
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“When I win, it is skill”                        “When I lose, it is bad luck”

There is a discrepancy or bias when explaining wins and losses. Quite often these discrepancies occur over a period of time and are more difficult to detect.

**Effect of the self-serving bias:**
- Those who tend to commit the self-serving bias tend to be happier, but have a less accurate perception of the world around them.
**Attributional biases and social perception**

- Physical attractiveness stereotype (PAS)
- Fundamental attributional error (FAE)
- Actor/Observer discrepancy
- Self-serving bias and self-effacing bias

These biases in attribution can be difficult to spot because they rarely occur in tandem (very rarely will we say we aced a test because of hard work, and then say we failed a test because it was unfair. These statements often follow each other after some time making them more difficult to see). We need to have an ear for what people say.

Who should learn about these attributional biases? Why should they learn about them?

What are the consequences of not recognizing how we make attributions--especially when we are inconsistent (or why should we study how we perceive others)?
**Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are beliefs and/or cognitive schemas that help us organize information about groups (page 518).

Stereotypes are mental shortcuts that allows us for easy, fast processing of social information. This process is often automatic and unconscious which makes their recognition difficult to recognize and inhibit.

As social scientists use the concept of stereotypes, they are neither good or bad. They reflect efficient cognitive processing (page 518). In fact, many stereotypes are accurate.

However, stereotypes can produce harmful results of prejudice and discrimination because they can be

1. inaccurate
2. overused
3. self-perpetuating, and
4. automatic


**Stereotypes are overused**

Figure 13.19 illustrates how categories warp perceptions (page 537).

Those who see the lines on the right (group A and group B)
- tend to overestimate the similarity of lines 1 and 3 and
- underestimate the similarity of lines between lines 3 and 4.

The difference between Group A and Group B (or line 3 and 4) is seen as larger than it actually is. Even with “content-less lines” that have no meaning, we exaggerate differences between groups.
When we categorize people by gender, religion, political affiliation, intelligence, generations (Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennial), socioeconomic status, extraverts versus introverts, etc., we tend to downplay the similarities across groups (men and women are more alike) and the variations within a group (democrats are quite different from one another democrats and republicans are quite different from other republicans)

This can lead to the outgroup homogeneity effect—the tendency for you to perceive the outgroup or “them” as more homogenous (similar) and the ingroup or “us” as quite diverse.
Stereotypes are overused

Boundaries can create the perception of differences when they don't exist. The following is a visual illusion from the Discovering Psychology #7: Sensation and Perception at about 20:00 into the video

Most people see two different shades in the left and right side. Now cover up the center line.
Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating

Stereotypes can be self-perpetuation (have a life of their own outside of reality) due to the following processes:

- Perceptual confirmation
  - We tend to seek and remember information consistent with our beliefs
  - We tend to forget and/or not notice information inconsistent with our beliefs
- Self-fulfilling prophecies
  - Empire Strikes Back
  - Elementary school “Bloomers”
  - Telephone conversation with who they believed was an attractive or unattractive woman
- Subtyping
Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating

Perceptual confirmation is a phenomenon that occurs when observers perceive what they expect to perceive (page 538).

Imagine six stock analysts making predictions about changes in a stock price. They were either right or wrong on 8 decisions.

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<th>Sam</th>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Dave</th>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>Sue</th>
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Which stock analyst had the best predictions?
**Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating**

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Based on the psychology of learning (Psy 202),

- Sam would be more optimistic in their skills (early reinforcement)
- Chris would be more pessimistic in their skill (early lack of reinforcement)
- Dave is probably more persistent in their ability (random reinforcement)
**Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating**

Your beliefs about people affect what you perceive (stereotypes can cause perceptual confirmation)—you perceive what is consistent with your beliefs which can be independent of the reality.

- If you believe that Jane is a good analyst, you are more likely to notice the times she is correct.
- If you believe that Sue is a bad analyst, you are more likely to notice the times she is wrong.
- If you believe that Ann is an average analyst, you might see her as average.

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Where else is perceptual confirmation relevant?
**Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating**

Your beliefs about people affect what you perceive (stereotypes can cause perceptual confirmation)—you perceive what is consistent with your beliefs which can be independent of the reality.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dog’s Name is Loki</th>
<th>Dog’s Name is Prince Charming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Dog" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Dog" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are more likely to perceive the bad things the dog does.  
You are more likely to perceive the good things he dog does.
Stereotypes can be self-perpetuating

Subtyping is the tendency for people who are faced with disconfirming evidence to modify their stereotypes (by creating a new category), rather than abandon them (page 539).

Subtyping stereotypic beliefs

If you believe that women are crazy and you come across a “normal” woman, you say she really isn’t a woman.

If you believe that men are stupid and you come across an “intelligent” man, you say he really isn’t a man. Subtyping stereotypic beliefs allows you to maintain your belief in the presence of disconfirming evidence.
Stereotypes can be Automatic

To demonstrate how pervasive negative stereotypes are in our culture, take the Implicit Attitude Test (IAT). This can be found on a weblink on the website.
Why do Stereotypes Matter?

• We are more likely to harm members of groups with negative stereotypes
  o Reminding people of negative stereotypes regarding intelligence increase the odds of poorer performance (see stereotype threat)
  o We are more likely to justify harm done to members of groups with negative stereotypes (e.g. sexual assault victims)
  o We are more likely to believe that harm done to members of groups with negative stereotypes

• We are more likely to support cuts in programs for those in need
  o You are more likely to support welfare programs that help the needy due to circumstances beyond their control (e.g. hurricanes)
  o You are more likely to cut welfare programs for the “welfare queen” (which is a very small minority of people who receive welfare).