Topic 2: Social Cognition and Attribution

==Social cognition==: Cognitive processes & structures that influence & are influenced by social behaviour. Also, feelings (affects, emotion, mood) influence & can be influenced by social cognitions.

2.1 Assumption of approaches to Social Psych.

Cognitive consistency (1940s-60s)	- People feel uncomfortable when their thoughts are contradictory, and they will do everything i.e. changing their attitudes to fix the inconsistencies.
Naïve scientist (1970s)	- People needs to attribute causes to behaviours & events in order to think the world a meaningful place in which to act. This is where *Attributions* come in.
Cognitive miser (Late 1970s-80s)	- People are more economic than accurate when jumping into conclusions as we use the least complex and demanding cognition that results in cognitive shortcuts (heuristics), errors & biases.
Motivated tactician (1990s onwards)	- People chooses cognitive strategies on the basis of goals, motives & needs. Cognitive can be schema (cognitive structures) or data driven

2.2 Forming impression of other people

==Affect infused model:== cognition is infused with affect such that social judgments reflect current mood.

Impressions are formed using some bits of info more than other. ==Central traits== (Warm or cold) have disproportionate influence on the formation of impressions as compared to ==Peripheral traits== (polite or blunt) which have insignificant influence. E.g. In Asch' study, there is a big difference in inferring

personalities, happy/unhappy, kind/unkind, etc..., if a hypothetical person was associated with *Warm* or *Cold* as compared to *Polite* or *Blunt.*

Criticism of concept of central trait:

- Asch argued that central traits are ones that highly (semantically) correlated with other traits like *Warm* to *good-natured* whereas Zanna and Hamilton argued that central traits are determined by context.
- Personal constructs: idiosyncratic and personal ways of characterising other people such that each of us determine which attributes are more important in making judgment. Eg. I might organise my impressions around humour and Mum might does the same round intelligence.
- Implicit personalities theories: widely shared within cultures but differ between cultures, idiosyncratic and personal ways of characterising others and explaining their behaviours such that we all have general principles (philosophies of human nature) that help us decide which characteristics would go together to form certain types of personality.

In Asch' study, people had more favourable impressions on a hypothetical person if they are presented with list of personalities in the order of intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, envious as compared to when the order was reversed.

- Primacy effect: Earlier presented info has major influence on social cognition, more common. E.g. 1st impression counts!
- Recency effect: Later presented info has major influence on social cognition, most likely to occur when we are distracted or we have no motivation to attend to someone.

People do tend to 'judge a book their cover' although it can be accurate at times but it also has undesirable implications.

- Knapp (1978) found that men who are taller than 1.88 m have 10% more starting salary than men who are under 1.83m. Additionally, attractive male executives are considered more able than the less attractive ones— this is reversed if the executives are females.
- Negative impressions formed by people rapidly characterise others based on physical cues (race, ethnicity, gender) are very hard to change. Even positive view of a stranger can be dramatically affected by a small negative info (as it is unusual, distinctive and may have

survival value as it signals potential danger**Evolution theory) whereas positive info has no impact on negative impression.

2.3 Social Schemas and categories

We store info about ourselves, others, events, places as ==Schemas:== cognitive structures that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus incl. its attributes and relations among these attributes and are a type of <u>top-down processing</u>. This allows to quickly make sense of a person, situations on the basis of limited info. E.g. Once we recognise that someone is working at Coles (role) because of what they were wearing or doing at the time (attributes) only then can we ask to look for a particular product (deciding on subsequent interaction).

Types of schemas:

- ==Person==: personal knowledge we have about specific people. E.g. Mum is kind and caring yet strict. She is scared of mice.
- ==Role:== knowledge structures about role occupants, often understood as schemas about social groups and if shared are <u>social stereotypes</u>. E.g. Doctors treats patients and should not be seen smoking in the hospital.
- ==Scripts==: schemas about events. E.g. Taking notes in Lecture or drinking at a party.
- ==Self-schema:== Often more complex and varied than person schemas the form self-concept (identity).
    - We can have multiple self-schemas to provide buffers form some of life's misfortunes. <u>Compartmentalised schemas</u> = I'm a great reader but I'm an awful singer. Thus, in situations where I'm required to sing, I'll get anxious (-ve mood) vs when I'm required to read out loud, I'll be fine (+ve mood).
    - Highly <u>compartmentalised</u> self-schemas➔ mood swings depending on which is primed.
    - ==Self-reference effect==: tendency to efficiently process and remember info related to self.
- ==Content free schemas:== rules about how to process info (rather than descriptions of persons or situations). Eg. I like Ed Sheeran and Ed likes Taylor thus I should like Taylor too in order to maintain balance.