

# PSYU2234 Social and Personality Psychology

## LECTURE: Attributions & the social self

### Making attributions:

**Attribution** is the process by which we make inferences about the causes of behaviour or events

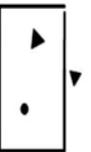
- Is this person interested in me romantically or are they just friendly, in general?
- Does my high exam mark prove that I am brilliant or was this just an easy test?

**Naïve scientist (Heider, 1958):**

- Characterises people as using rational, scientific-like, cause-effect analyses to understand their world
  - try to rationally work out the reasons for behaviour

**Three principles (Heider):**

- 1. Behaviour is motivated:** Tend to see all behaviour as having a cause - this provides insight into the person
  - Irresistible; teleological explanations
    - This type of thinking is **irresistible**
      - EXPERIMENT: film of a circle and two triangles: -> motivated interpretation: individual getting caught having an affair
    - **teleological explanations**
      - tend to think the function of a object has an underlying cause
      - e.g. nature disaster = being punished by God
- 2. Predict and control**
  - explain others intentions
    - i.e can predict others future actions based on their disposition
    - > random world becoming more controlled
- 3. Two kinds of attributions:**
  - Internal (dispositional)
  - External (situational)
    - Scenario: car is parked across two parking slots.
      - Internal - driver is selfish.
      - External - driver had an emergency
    - **Misattribution** is when we believe something is caused by a dispositional trait (internal) without realising is it due to the situation (external)



**Correspondent inference: (Jones & Davis, 1965):**

**Correspondent inferences:** An inference that behaviour corresponds to, or is indicative of, a stable personal characteristic

- We prefer correspondent inferences
  - predict behaviour and sense of control
  - E.g. Smiling person = nice person
- Other plausible reasons reduce correspondence
  - E.g. finding out smiling person was actually laughing at you

**LIMITATIONS:**

- Applied to only single observation of behaviour
  - Doesn't consider behaviour in other contexts
- Only dispositional attributes (internal attributions)

- Doesn't explain external attributions which correspond to behaviour

**Covariation model: Kelly's (1967):**

- Multiple observation points
- Processes for making both external & internal attributions

**Covariation principle:** People assign the cause of a behaviour to the factor that covaries most closely with the behaviour

- Internal disposition or external factors?
- For something to be the cause of a particular behaviour, it must be present when it occurs and absent when it doesn't occur
  - Sometimes called ANOVA approach: looking at different factors and whether it leads to internal or external attributions

EXAMPLE:

**Why does your friend rave about the class?**

- The covariation information table demonstrates how we collect data on: **attributes, consensus, distinctiveness and consistency**
- Determines if friend has idiosyncratic taste (internal attribution), or the class is good (external attribution)

<b>Attribution</b>	<b>Consensus</b>	<b>Distinctiveness</b>	<b>Consistency</b>
An external attribution is likely if the behaviour is: <b>(the class is good)</b>	High in consensus: Everyone raves about the class	High in distinctiveness: Your friend does not rave about many other classes	High in consistency: your friend has raved about the class on many occasions
An internal attribution is likely if the behaviour is: <b>(it's just your friend)</b>	Low in consensus: Hardly anyone raves about the class	Low in distinctiveness: Your friend raves about all classes	High in consistency: Your friend has raved about the class on many occasions

**LIMITATIONS:**

- Tend not to consider consensus information
- Rather just take into account what other people have to say (dispositional internal attributes)

**Performance attributions: Weiner (1979):**

- Looking at successes/failures NOT concluding whether behaviour is due to external or internal
- Achievement attribution is a function of 3 factors:
  - **Locus:** is the performance caused by the actor (internal) or the situation (external)?
  - **Stability:** is the internal or external cause a stable or unstable one?
  - **Controllability:** to what extent is future task performance under the actor's control

**The fundamental attribution error:**

The tendency to make internal attributions over external attributions in explaining the behaviour of OTHERS

- Correspondence bias
- E.g. when late to work boss might say employee is lazy(internal) but employee blames traffic (external)