

Attribution Theory

We do not observe traits, we observe behaviours and *infer* personal attributes which may have caused the behaviour.

Theories:

Heider: First to create the dichotomy of situational vs. dispositional factors.

Jones and Davis: The correspondent inference theory

Tendency to take someone's statement of opinion as a sign of what they believe. People tend to attribute to movie actors, especially to type cast ones, beliefs, attitudes, and even character traits. We see someone help a student that drops his lunch, and we assume that he is a kind person.

Likely to make dispositional rather than situational attribution about an actor when the behaviour is intentional (deliberate or voluntary), uncommon, and low in social desirability.

Kelley: Covariation Rule

Consensus information - do all or only a few people respond to the stimulus in the same way as the target person?

Distinctiveness information - does the target person respond in the same way to other stimuli as well?

Consistency information - does the target person always respond in the same way to this stimulus?

Three combinations of this information:

1. High consensus, high distinctiveness, high consistency: The target person's judgment of the restaurant (it is a good restaurant) should be perceived as valid if the perceiver knows that 1) other people like the restaurant, 2) the target person seldom likes restaurants, and 3) the target person enjoys the restaurant every time he or she goes there. The restaurant is good.
2. Low consensus, low distinctiveness, high consistency: If a perceiver knows that 1) most people do not like the target person's restaurant, 2) the target person likes most restaurants and 3) the target person enjoys the restaurant each time s/he goes there. Target person's enjoyment at restaurant attributable to something about him/her (likes to eat out) not something unique about the restaurant.

3. Low consensus, high distinctiveness, low consistency: If a perceiver knows 1) few other people like the restaurant, 2) the target person seldom likes the restaurant, and 3) the target person disliked this restaurant in the past. More than likely the target person's liking this restaurant is attributable to the person liking the company or wine rather than the food.

Daryl Bem: Self-perception Theory: the same processes of attribution are used to infer our own motives as well as those of others.

Rotter: Locus of Control

Attributional Bias

Fundamental Attribution Error: Ross et al (1977) asked observers to rate the general knowledge of questioners and answerers in a game show. The former were rated as superior.

Self-Serving Bias: We tend to take credit for our successes, identify an internal cause, and dissociate from our failures, blaming external factors. Jones asked participants to teach arithmetic to two pupils. The "teacher" attributed improved performance to themselves but blamed pupils if they continued to do poorly.

Actor-Observer divergence: The "actor" tends to attribute cause to situational factors, whereas observers attribute the same actions to disposition.

Defensive Attribution: The greater the consequence of an action, the more that attribution will be dispositional rather than situational. Walster described a car accident and asked participants to rate the car owner's responsibility. The more serious the consequences of the accident, the more responsibility the owner was assigned. Lerner's Just World Hypothesis.

Downward Comparison: research on women who have undergone masectomy.

In-group Bias: Duncan showed white participants a video of a white or black person violently pushing another during a heated conversation. Participants made internal attributions (violent personality) when the pusher was Black and external ones (he was provoked) when he was White.

Seligman on Attribution Style:

Internal/External	Stable/Unstable	Global/local
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ISG is the most punishing: the Depressive style

Mother's attribution style for stress events correlated with children ---> .42