

II. Attribution Theory

A. Definitions

1. Attribution = the inferences we make about the causes of other peoples behavior
2. Types of potential causes
 - a. Internal = the person caused the behavior
 - Dispositional – Behavior reflects personality
Likely to happen again
 - Intentional – Behavior was chosen
 - Unintentional – Behavior was not chosen (e.g., accidental)
 - b. External = the situation caused the behavior

B. Kelly's Covariation Model

- The attribution process = search for information about what a behavior co-occurs (covaries) with:
 - a. Beh. Co-occurs with the Situation = External Attribution
 - b. Beh. Co-occurs with the the Person = Internal Attribution
- Dominating Metaphor: Views people as Naive Scientists - analyze the world in a rational manner

1. Covariation Information

- a) **Consensus Information:** Do other people behave this way in this situation?
- b) **Consistency Information:** Is the person's behavior consistent across time in this situation?
- c) **Distinctiveness Information:** Is the person's behavior unique to this situation?

1. Covariation Information cont.

Low Consensus, Low Distinctiveness, and
High Consistency
= Internal Attributions

High Consensus, High Distinctiveness, and
High Consistency
= External (Situational) Attributions

2. Person x Situation Examples

Beh = Cursing - = no cursing + = cursing	Situation					
	Class		Play		Space	
	Room	Ground	Ship	d1	d2	
Stan	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kyle	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cartman	+	+	+	+	+	+

- Low Consensus, Low Distinctiveness, High Consistency

Handwritten notes:
 - Consensus (circled around Stan, Kyle, Cartman)
 - Low Consensus (arrow pointing to Stan, Kyle)
 - Consistency (circled around d1, d2)
 - High (circled around Cartman's +)
 - Distinctiveness Low (circled around Cartman's +)

2. Person x Situation Examples

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	Room	Ground	Ship	d1	d2	
Stan	-	-	-	-	+	+
Kyle	-	-	-	-	+	+
Cartman	-	-	-	+	+	+

- High Consensus, High Distinctiveness, High Consistency

Handwritten notes:
 - Beh. of interest (vertical text on the right)
 - Consensus - High
 - Consistency - High
 - Distinctiveness - High
 - external (bracketed around the above three)

3. Final Comments

- When any of these is missing, we are less confident about making internal attributions.
- This process will help identify what is internal (caused by the person), but it does not tell us what internal factors caused the behavior. (Dispositions vs. Other motives)

C. Theory of Correspondent Inference (Jones and Davis)

- Attempts to explain how we can use an individual's behavior to infer information about their personality (a correspondent inference) and rule out behaviors that are not reflective of one's personality (a non-correspondent inference).

C. Theory of Correspondent Inference (Jones and Davis)

- **Correspondent Inference** = behavior reflects dispositions and intentions
 - Behavior corresponds with intentions
- **Noncorrespondent Inference** = behaviors are unintentional or external

1. Correspondence Information

- a) Whether or not behaviors are **Freely Chosen** (or intended):
 - Based on Knowledge and Ability
 - Did you knowingly do it (or reasonably know what the outcome would be)
 - Did you have the ability to do it (or prevent it).
 - e.g., are the video taped confessions of hostages, believable?

1. Correspondence Information

2) Motives with **Noncommon Effects**:

Outcomes that only have one likely cause (motive / behavior) are very diagnostic (Jones & Davis)

When there are multiple likely causes for the behavior then we become less confident.

Accused Pleads Guilty; we agree

- Few likely causes besides guilt

Accused Pleads Innocent; we don't know what to do.

- May plead innocent because they are innocent
- May plead innocent to avoid punishment

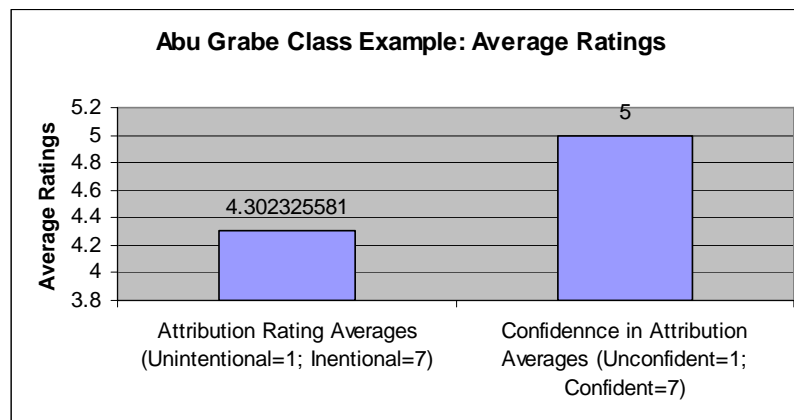
1. Correspondence Information

3) Socially Desirability of Behavior

- Behavior low in social desirability is more diagnostic than highly socially desirable Beh.
- This is really an extension of the analysis of noncommon effects.
 - Social desirability serves as another potential cause for behavior.
- Beh. = Mr. X kicks your dog
 - Infer the Mr. X is a dog hating jerk
- Beh. = Mr. X pets your dog
 - Mr. X may or may not really like dogs.

1. Correspondence Information

- Freely chosen behavior + non common effects + not clearly socially desirable = tells us about an individual's personality (correspondent inference).
- if any of these is missing, we will be less certain about our judgments and more likely to make noncorrespondent attributions for behavior



- Our class ratings based on the Sabrina Harmon Abu Grabe example, suggest that we don't follow the Jones & Davis model very well. Given her limited ability avoid participating in the torture activities, competing potential motives for her behavior, and the social desirability of her behavior within the context of the prison, we should conclude that her behavior does not reflect her intentions and we should have little confidence in our judgements.

III. Attributional Biases

A) Bias? What Bias?

- The preceding models and processes are examples of how we should and sometimes do make attributional decisions.
- They paint a picture of a Rational, Thorough, Scientific reasoning.
- We don't always do this

- We don't always do this, especially when:

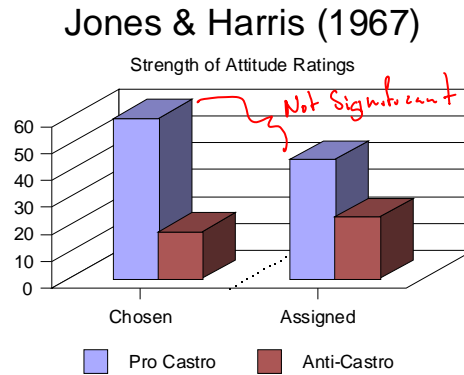
- 1) We have a limited amount of information
- 2) We have a limited amount of time
- 3) We have a limited amount of energy
- 4) Our personal interests interfere with being rational.

B) The Correspondent Bias / Fundamental Attribution Error

1. The tendency to make internal-dispositional attributions about other people's behavior, even when situational causes are clearly present.
2. Jones & Harris (1967)
 - Participants read Pro-Castro essays that were written by political science students.
 - ½ Ps told that the essay topic was assigned.
 - ½ Ps told that the essay topic was chosen.

Jones & Harris (1967) cont.

- Ps rated how much the speech writer was Pro- and Anti-Castro
- Assigned condition ratings were similar to Chosen condition.
- People failed to use the situational information.



C) The Actor Observer Bias

1) What is it?

A limitation on CB/FAE

- Attributions about self behavior = external attributions
- Attributions about other's behavior = internal-dispositional attributions

C) The Actor Observer Bias

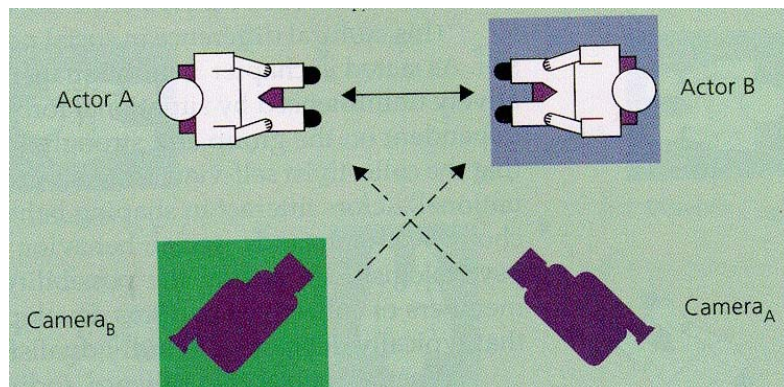
2) Why does it occur

- a. We have lots of information about ourselves.
 - across situations (high distinctiveness)
 - across time (low consistency)
 - “I can think of lots of times when I didn’t do X”.
- b. Our own beh. is not the focus of our attention. The situation is.
 - we are freed from perceptual salience effects

b) continued

- Storms (1973)

- 2 participants are assigned to be actors and have a conversation on predetermined topic



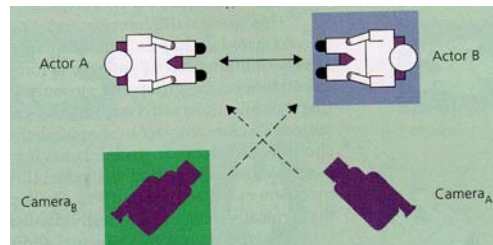
b) continued

Afterward, actors rate the amount of causal influence they each had over the conversation.

-with respect to figure:

Actor A: Actor B more causal than Actor A

Actor B: Actor A more causal than Actor B



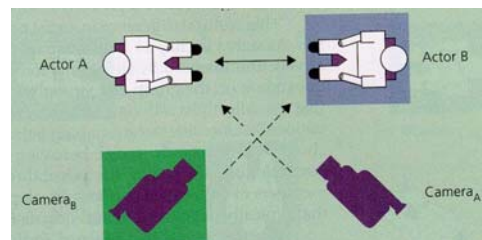
b) continued

Next, actors watched video of the conversation taken from the perspective of the other actor.

This changed the actor's attributions of their own behavior. They became consistent with what an observer would make.

Actor A : Actor A more causal than Actor B

Actor B : Actor B more causal than Actor A



D. The Self Serving Bias

1) What ?

- A limitation on the Actor-Observer Bias.

If we are Actor → - Positive Outcome = Internal Attribution

- I got an A because I am smart and studied hard.

- Negative Outcome = External Attribution

- I got an F because the teacher wrote a hard test

*Observer → + = External Attribution
- = Internal Attribution*

2) Why ?

a) Cognitive Explanation

- Expectancy Confirmation = I expect positive outcomes and assume that my efforts will make them happen.

- Positive outcomes = its the result of my efforts.

- Negative outcomes = something external interfered with my efforts.

2) Why ?

b) Motivational Explanation =

-Self-Esteem Maintenance = I want to protect my view of myself.

-Self-Presentation Concerns = I want to protect the view that others hold of me