Social Psychology

Chapter 13
Impression formation and Attribution theory

- Study of the ways in which thoughts, feelings, perceptions, motives, and behavior are influenced by interactions with other people
  - How we interpret the behavior of others
  - How we form impressions of others
  - How we form attitudes toward others/objects
  - How others influence our own behavior
  - How we establish relationships with others

- Social cognition: use of cognitive processes to understand others and ourselves

Friends agree that person is:

- Industrious, intelligent, practical, warm, determined, cautious, skillful
- Rate overall impression of person
  - Very favorable (1) – Very unfavorable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Do you think this person is likable?
  - Very likable (1) - Very unlikable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Y or N? Does this trait describe the individual?
  - Generous  Wise  Good-natured
  - Reliable  Happy  Important

Friends agree that person is:

- Envious, stubborn, critical, fun-loving, irritating, artistic, clever, helpful
- Rate overall impression of person
  - Very favorable (1) – Very unfavorable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Do you think this person is likable?
  - Very likable (1) - Very unlikable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Y or N? Does this trait describe the individual?
  - Generous  Wise  Good-natured
  - Reliable  Happy  Important
Friends agree that person is:
- Sensible, careful, cold, smart, skillful, productive, determined
- Rate overall impression of person
  - Very favorable (1) – Very unfavorable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Do you think this person is likable?
  - Very likable (1) – Very unlikable (7)
  - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Y or N? Does this trait describe the individual?
  - Generous, Wise, Good-natured
  - Reliable, Happy, Important

Impression formation
- Did a single word change overall impression?
- Did change in order of positive / negative traits change overall impression?

1. Industrious, intelligent, practical, warm, determined, cautious, skillful
2. Envious, stubborn, critical, fun-loving, irritating, artistic, clever, helpful
3. Sensible, careful, cold, smart, skillful, productive, determined
4. Warm, cooperative, reckless, witty, active, spiteful, inflexible, judgmental

Person perception
- First Impressions
  - Serial position curve effects (primacy & recency)
  - Anchor and adjustment heuristic
- Bottom up (features)
  - Physical appearance
- Top down (schema)
  - Social schema – influence of knowledge
  - Infer elements that may not have been present
What happened to cause this event?
- Woman spills her coffee at a restaurant
- You get an “A” on the exam
- A student takes a semester off from school
- You get pulled over by a cop for speeding
- A Mom hits the bottom of child in the mall
- Someone cuts you off on the highway
- Student drops food tray in Burwell
- You miss class
- You pull an all-nighter before a paper is due
- President is caught plagiarizing his speeches

Attribution
- How people make sense about their own and others’ behavior
  - Inferences of cause and effect
  - Try to identify factors that give rise to outcomes
- Why do this?
  - Make predictions about the future
- Process automatic and/or deliberate
- “Covariation model of attribution”
  - Do they always do this in this situation?
  - Do others do this in this situation?
  - Do they do they do this in other situations?

Attribution theory
- Explain event by attributing behavior to:
  - Internal attribution:
    - Disposition or personality
    - Behavior is due to person’s stable characteristics
    - Can predict future behaviors
  - External attribution:
    - Situation or environment
    - Behavior is due to outside forces
    - Says little about future behaviors

Attribution bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good behavior</th>
<th>Bad behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Disposition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Biases in attribution

- Actor-Observer bias
  - Own behavior – external
  - Others behavior - internal
- Fundamental attribution error: *Others’ behavior*
  - Overestimate internal factors
  - Underestimate external situational factors
- Self-serving bias: *Own behavior*
  - Success = internal
  - Failure = external
- Adaptive value vs. incorrect conclusions

Jones & Nisbett (1970s)

- Had Ss write 4 essays
  - Why do you/best friend like the person you date?
  - Why did you/best friend choose your major?
- DV: coded for internal/external attribution
- Results:
  - Self: more situational attributions (external)
  - Best friend: more dispositional attributions (internal)
- Conclusions:
  - Use “it depends” more in reference to self
  - Actor-Observer bias

Jones & Harris (1967)

Fundamental attribution error

- Essay evaluation of either Pro or Anti-Castro
- Author chose/forced to take a side
- Guess author’s true attitude

![Graph showing choice and condition](image)

- People tend to attribute action to internal factor

Interpretation of actor-observer difference

Motivation

- Cognitive dissonance
  - Behavior/belief at odds with self-concept; inconsistency
  - Try to reduce it when possible
- Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)
  - Act in a way that contradicts true feeling/attitude
  - IV: Paid $1 or $20 to lie (or no lie condition)
  - DV: How enjoyable was the study
  - Justification of effort
- Results…
**Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)**

Cognitive dissonance

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>enjoyable</th>
<th>would participate similar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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**Interpretation of actor-observer difference**

- **Cognitive interpretation**
  - Know ourselves better than know others
  - Know only one situation for others
  - Less dispositional attributions when know person better (best friend)
- **Perceptual interpretation**
  - Different perspectives
  - Can’t see what actor is responding to
  - Can’t observe own behavior

**Above-average effect (Harter, 1990)**

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- College Board: 1 million HS students
  - 70%: said above average on leadership
  - 100%: above average for getting along with others
  - 60% said above average in athletics
- People judge themselves as above-average on favorable characteristics
- Why?
  - Memory is selective
  - Protect self-image of themselves and others

**Consider:**

- Why do we make attribution errors?
- Can you think of a recent example of this type of error in your own life?
- Relate your example to the terms:
  - Fundamental attribution error
  - Actor-observer effect
  - Self-serving bias
Chapter 13
Stereotypes and prejudice

Stereotypes
- Beliefs held about traits and behaviors that belong to a particular group and its members
- Most common: gender, race, age

Prejudice
- Negative stereotype that leads people to negatively evaluate group members
- Emphasis on difference between groups

Discrimination
- Prejudiced beliefs lead to behaviors

Sources of stereotypes and prejudice
- Schemas or heuristics
  - Organize and reduce amount of information
- Social learning
  - Conformity to a social norm
  - Media
- Social and economic conflict
  - Social categorization
  - Scapegoating or blaming the innocent
- Dissimilarity and social distance
  - Blue-eyed vs. Brown-eyed example
    - http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html

Thought paper
- Blue-eyed / Brown-eyed movie:
  - What did you learn about stereotypes and prejudice from the movie?
  - What other comments, thoughts, or questions do you have about the movie?
Effect of stereotypes and prejudice

- Self-fulfilling prophecies
  - Beliefs cause the expected behavior
  - Snyder et al. (1977): phone study
- Stereotype threat
  - Expectation IQ test performance affects final score
  - Activation of negative stereotype
- Automatic activation of stereotype

Stereotype activation on action

- Behavior can be triggered automatically
  - Wegner's white bear study
- Social behavior affected by unconscious thoughts
  - Bargh, Chen, & Burrows (1996)
    - Unscramble sentences about rudeness → interrupt faster
    - Flash words about aging → walk slower
    - Flash negative stereotypes about African Americans → fictional character evaluated as more aggressive
- Are our thoughts and behaviors under our control?

Combating prejudice

- Education
  - Possibly the least effective tool
  - People usually avoid or discount information
- New role models
  - Discussion forums
- Repeated positive exposure
  - Intergroup cooperation
- Legislation
  - Speak up against discriminatory behavior
- Examine your own beliefs – be aware!
  - Control requires awareness and motivation

Consider:

- What are the conclusions of Keating's research?
- How are the conclusions different for children and adults?
- What does it tell us about attitude formation, persuasion, and leadership?
Chapter 13
Influence and obedience

Conformity
- Look to others for behavior and attitudes
- Go along with group even when know they are wrong
- Why?
  - Cognitive: Want to be right
    - More likely to conform if unsure
    - Ally effect: no conformity if 1 other has their answer
  - Motivational: Want to be liked
    - Fear ostracism from the group
    - Avoid rejection

Power of authority: Milgram (1963)
- Recruited for study of “memory”
- White-coated experimenter: “examine effect of punishment on learning”
- Run subjects in pairs: “learner” and “teacher”
  - Learner was confederate
  - Teacher watches:
    - Learner get strapped to chair
    - Electrodes attached to wrist
Power of authority: Milgram (1963)

- Teacher administered punishment when learner was incorrect (slight to severe shock)
  - Increase punishment with each error
- If object to continuing: “You must go on.”
- How far do the participants go in obeying experimenter?

Volt | Reaction
-----|---------
 75  | Grunt   
120  | Shout in pain
150  | Refuse to continue
200  | Screams
300  | No answer, heart
330+ | Silence

Milgram’s quote

- “I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20min he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his ear lobe and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered “Oh God, lets stop it”. And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end.”

Milgram’s study of obedience

- Why did 65% of the participants in the study deliver the highest level shock?!
- If you were to design a similar study, what variables would you change? Why?
Factors: Tendency to Obey

- High status of authority figure, prestige of Yale, for science
- Belief among subordinates that the source of the authority will be responsible for their actions – not them
- Absence of a clear-cut point for switching to disobedience
- The gradual nature of many obedience situations (mild consequences at first – and only later are there harmful effects)

Strong tendency to obey direct commands

Conclusion: Behavior not just due to personality – due to situation too

Conformity

Conformity

Obedience

- Ethics of Milgram’s research?
  - Participants mislead and were severely distressed
  - Do the benefits outweigh the costs?
- Don’t think Milgram’s research is “real”?
  - McDonald’s story: “Police” phone in to strip-search employee

- http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15544195/