

Social cognition, attribution and social influence

Supported GRE teaching and original transfer practice

Identify the evidence

Identify the evidence

Apply attribution theory and its characteristic errors

Use the overview measurement lesson VI for research inference.

Concepts 1

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Attribution assigns causes to behaviour: internal (dispositional) or external (situational). The fundamental attribution error over-uses dispositional explanations for others, and the actor-observer asymmetry reverses this for ourselves. Correspondent inference asks when an act reveals a trait: freely chosen, unexpected or low-consensus acts are the most informative.

Influence comes in two kinds: normative influence is conforming to be accepted; informational influence is accepting others' behaviour as evidence about reality. Asch's line studies showed conformity to a unanimous majority on unambiguous judgements; Milgram's obedience studies showed destructive compliance with an authority. Conformity falls sharply with one dissenting partner.

Concepts 2

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Cognitive dissonance is the tension from holding inconsistent cognitions, reduced by changing attitudes or justifications; with insufficient external justification, people internalise the behaviour. Persuasion follows the elaboration likelihood model: the central route (arguments) produces durable change when audiences can and will think; the peripheral route (cues, attractiveness) is fragile.

Self-evaluation processes include self-affirmation (restoring worth in an unaffected domain after a threat), self-verification (seeking confirming feedback), self-monitoring (adjusting self-presentation) and the self-serving bias (success internal, failure external). Excitation transfer lets residual arousal from one event intensify a later emotional reaction.

Reason through the worked case

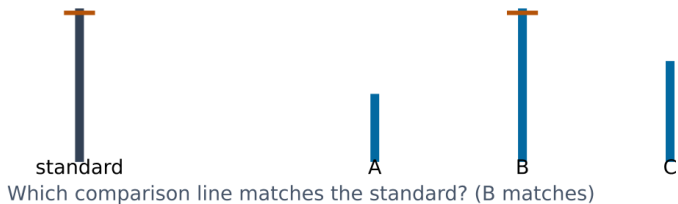
Reason through the worked case

A student copies a group's route choice because they believe the group knows the campus. How does this differ from copying to avoid ridicule?

Believing the group has useful knowledge fits informational influence. Avoiding ridicule fits normative influence. The same outward action can arise through different mechanisms. Anonymity, uncertainty and private accounts may help distinguish them in an ethically approved task.

Read the reviewed representation

Asch-style judgement: an unambiguous match (schematic)



Original schematic for Social cognition, attribution and social influence. Illustrative relationships and numbers are not research results.

Attempt an unfamiliar case

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A late student is called lazy, but the bus stopped unexpectedly. Build a better attribution and name what remains unknown.

Pause and write the explanation before continuing.

Check the transfer argument

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The bus interruption supplies a plausible situational cause. A single event does not establish a stable lazy trait, nor does it prove there are never dispositional contributions. Compare behaviour across occasions, constraints and available alternatives before generalizing. Explain the evidence rather than merely naming attribution bias.

Accept a different explanation when its evidence and limits are justified.

Limit the conclusion

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Do not merge conformity and obedience (peer pressure versus authority), or call every dispositional inference an error; the error is neglecting the situation, not using traits at all.

Original classroom cases are not official questions or personal clinical advice.

Check yourself

Independent retrieval

An observer explains failure by laziness without knowing the situation. What evidence would permit a better attribution?

Write your reasoning before comparing it with the methods and limits taught in this lesson.