

Aronson Wilson Akert

**Chapter 4**

**Social Perception:**  
How We Come to Understand Other People

Slides prepared by Jo Nell Strough, Ph.D. & Philip Lemaster, M.A., West Virginia University

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



*Things are seldom as they seem. Skim milk masquerades as cream.*  
– W. S. Gilbert

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON



- Why are people the way they are?
- Why do people act the way do?
  - Thinking about people and their behavior helps us to understand and predict our social world

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

## Social Perception

- The study of how we form impressions of and make inferences about other people.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## First Impressions

- “Judging a book by its cover”
  - Easily observable things we can see and hear
  - Crucial to first impression

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



What emotion do you think is being displayed on each of these faces? Research by Becker et al. (2007) suggests that you might have found it easier to detect anger on the male faces and happiness on the female faces.  
 Source: Courtesy of D. Vaughn Becker

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





## Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Are facial expressions of emotion universal?
- Yes, for the six major emotional expressions
  - Anger, happiness, surprise, fear, disgust, and sadness

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Facial Expressions of Emotion

- All humans
  - **Encode** or express these emotions in the same way
  - **Decode** or interpret with equal accuracy

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Six major emotions are first to occur in human development
- Other emotions develop later
  - Guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride
- Other emotions
  - Show less universality across cultures
  - Closely tied to social interaction

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Nonverbal Communication

- Display rules
  - Dictate what kinds of emotional expressions people are supposed to show
  - Are culture specific

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Channels of Nonverbal Communication

- Emblems
  - Nonverbal gestures that have well-understood definitions within a given culture; they usually have direct verbal translations, like the "OK" sign.
- Emblems are not universal!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Multichannel Nonverbal Communication

- Nonverbal information is diffused across many channels in everyday life
- Can use more than one channel to decode
- Increases ability to make accurate judgments

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Implicit Personality Theories: Filling in the Blanks

- To understand other people
  - Observe their behavior
  - Infer feelings, traits, and motives.
- To make inferences
  - Use schemas about which personality traits go together in one person

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Implicit Personality Theories: Filling in the Blanks

- Implicit Personality Theory
  - A type of schema people use to group various kinds of personality traits together; for example, many people believe that someone who is kind is generous as well.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Implicit Personality Theories: Filling in the Blanks

- Advantage
  - Form impressions quickly
- Disadvantages
  - Make incorrect assumptions
  - Stereotypical thinking
    - Believe that person is like all the other members of his or her group

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Implicit Personality Theories

- Schemas
  - Shared by people in a culture
  - Passed across generations

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Implicit Personality Theories

- American culture
- Implicit personality theory that “what is beautiful is good”
  - People with physical beauty also have a host of other positive qualities

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Implicit Personality Theories

- Chinese culture
  - Implicit theory of personality of traditional Chinese values
    - Creating and maintaining interpersonal harmony, inner harmony, and ren qin (focus on relationships)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Culture and Implicit Personality Theories

- "Artistic personality"
- Western cultures
  - Person is creative, intense, and temperamental, unconventional lifestyle
- Chinese
  - Do not have a schema or implicit personality theory for an "artistic type"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

## Culture and Implicit Personality Theories

- China has implicit personality theories that do not exist in Western cultures
  - Shi gú person
    - Worldly, devoted to his or her family, socially skillful, and somewhat reserved

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

## Causal Attribution Answering the "Why" Question

- Two theories
  - Attribution Theory (Fritz Heider)
  - Covariation Model (Harold Kelley)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON



According to Fritz Heider, we tend to see the causes of a person's behavior as internal. For example, when a person on the street asks for money, we are likely to assume that he is at fault for being poor— perhaps lazy or drug-addicted. If we knew the person's situation— perhaps he has lost his job due to a factory closing or has a spouse whose medical bills have bankrupted them—we might come up with a different, external attribution.

Source: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Attribution Theory (Heider)

- Heider
  - “Father” of attribution theory
  - “Naïve” or “commonsense” psychology
    - Viewed people as amateur scientists
      - Piece together information to figure out cause
- Attribution theory
  - Addresses how we infer the causes of other people’s behavior

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Nature of the Attribution Process

- When deciding about causes of behavior, we can make one of two attributions
  - Internal, dispositional attribution
  - External, situational attribution

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Internal Attribution

- Infer a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the person (e.g., attitude, character, personality).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## External Attribution

- Infer a person is behaving a certain way because of something about the situation.
- Assume most people would respond the same way in that situation.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Nature of the Attribution Process

- Example—satisfied married couples
  - Partner’s positive behaviors
    - Internal attributions
      - E.g., “She helped me because she’s such a generous person.”
  - Negative behaviors
    - External attributions
      - E.g., “He said something mean because he’s so stressed at work this week.”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Nature of the Attribution Process

- Example—spouses in distressed marriages
  - Partners’ positive behaviors
    - external causes
      - E.g., “She helped me because she wanted to impress our friends.”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Nature of the Attribution Process

- Example—spouses in distressed marriages
  - Negative behaviors
    - internal causes
      - E.g., “He said something mean because he’s a totally self-centered jerk.”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Nature of the Attribution Process

- Tend to make internal attributions for other people’s behavior
- Why?
  - Perceptually, we focus on people
  - Overlook the situation (external explanation)
    - Hard to see
    - Difficult to describe

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Covariation Model (Kelley)

- A theory that states that to form an attribution about what caused a person's behavior, we systematically note the pattern between the presence or absence of possible causal factors and whether or not the behavior occurs.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Covariation Model

- Focuses on how behavior "covaries"
  - Across time, place, actors, & targets
- Examines how perceiver chooses an internal or an external attribution

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Covariation Model

- We make choices about internal versus external attributions by using three pieces of information
  - Consensus
  - Distinctiveness
  - Consistency

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Consensus Information

- The extent to which other people behave the same way toward the same stimulus as the actor does.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Distinctiveness Information

- The extent to which one particular actor behaves in the same way to different stimuli.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Consistency Information

- The extent to which the behavior between one actor and one stimulus is the same across time and circumstances.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# The Fundamental Attribution Error

- Why does it occur?
  - Tend to focus attention on person, not the surrounding situation
    - The person is “perceptually salient”
  - Use the focus of attention as a starting point

**Perceptual Salience**  
 The seeming importance of information that is the focus of people’s attention.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# The Two-Step Process of Attributions

1. Make an internal attribution
  - Assume that a person’s behavior was due to something about that person
  - Occurs quickly, spontaneously
2. Adjust attribution by considering the situation
  - May fail to make enough adjustment in second step
  - Requires effort, conscious attention

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

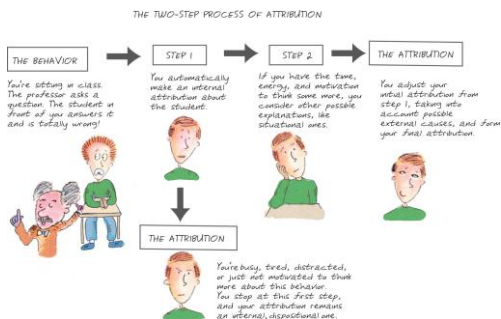
---

---

---

---

---



**Figure 4.7**  
 The Two-Step Process of Attribution

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## The Two-Step Process of Attributions

- Engage in the second step if:
  - You consciously slow down, think carefully before reaching a judgment
  - You are motivated to reach an accurate a judgment
  - You are suspicious about the behavior (e.g., we suspect lying)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Cultural Differences in Social Perception

- Western Cultures
  - Stress individual autonomy
    - Person is self-contained, independent
- East Asian cultures
  - Emphasize group autonomy
    - Sense of self comes from group belongingness

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Cultural Differences in Social Perception Video



Click on the screenshot to watch people from collectivistic cultures discuss the importance of group belongingness.

[Back to Directory](#)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Cultural Differences in Social Perception

- Analytic thinking style
  - Associated with Western cultural values
  - Focus on objects or people
- Holistic thinking style
  - Associated with Eastern cultural values
  - Focus on “whole picture”
    - Person or object and relationships between people

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

## Culture and the Fundamental Attribution Error

- Members of individualistic cultures
  - They prefer dispositional attributions
  - They think like personality psychologists

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON



Research has shown that when forming attributions, people in collectivistic cultures such as Japan are more likely to take situational information into account than are people in individualistic cultures.  
Source: Steve Vidler/SuperStock

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ALWAYS LEARNING Social Psychology, Eighth Edition Elliot Aronson | Timothy D. Wilson | Robin M. Akert ©2013 Pearson Education, Inc. All Rights Reserved. PEARSON

## Culture and the Fundamental Attribution Error

- Members of collectivistic cultures:
  - Prefer situational explanations
  - Think like social psychologists
  - Greater situational focus is matter of degree
    - Do they make dispositional attributions
    - Are they more likely to go on to the "second step"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Self-Serving Attributions

- Explanations for one's successes that credit internal, dispositional factors and explanations for one's failures that blame external, situational factors.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Self-Serving Attributions

- Why do we make self-serving attributions?
  1. We want to maintain self-esteem.
  2. We want other people to think well of us and to admire us.
  3. We know more about the situational factors that affect our own behavior than we do about other people's.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Self-Serving Attributions

- Defensive Attributions
  - Explanations for behavior that avoid feelings of vulnerability and mortality.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Defensive Attribution

- Belief in a just world
  - The assumption that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Belief in a Just World

- Advantage
  - Allows people to deal with feelings of vulnerability, mortality
- Disadvantage
  - Blaming the victim
    - Rape victims
    - Battered wives

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Bias "Blind Spot"

- People realize biases in attribution can occur
- Believe other people more susceptible to attributional biases compared to self

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Culture and Other Attributional Biases

- Self-serving bias
  - More prevalent in Western, individualistic cultures than Eastern collectivist cultures
- Belief in a Just World
  - More prevalent in cultures with extreme differences in wealth

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Summary and Review

- Nonverbal Behavior
- Attribution Theory (Heider)
- Covariation Model (Kelley)
- Fundamental Attribution Error
- Self-Serving Attributions
- Defensive Attributions
- Role of Culture in Social Perception

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---