Mod.74 – Attribution, Attitudes, & Actions:

- **Social psychology** - study how we think about, influence, and relate to one another.
- **Social psychologists** focus on the situation. They study the social influences that explain why the same persona will act differently in different situations.
- Social psychology is NOT sociology!
  - Social psychology - considers how individuals interact with each other and society at large
  - Sociology – explores the behavior of groups and cultures as they interact internally and externally

A. The Fundamental Attribution Error:

1) **Attribution Theory** – we explain someone’s behavior by crediting either the situation or the person’s disposition

   a. Fritz Heider proposed the attribution theory – we can attribute the behavior to the person’s stable, enduring traits (a dispositional attribution) or we can attribute it to the situation (a situational attribution).

   b. Attribution Theory – deals with our causal explanations for behavior; we attribute behavior to the individual’s disposition (personality, their character) or to the situation; (Attribute = regard something as being caused by, blame it on)

   c. People either explain others’ behavior as being due either to their dispositions or to their situations

   d. B/c people have enduring personality traits, we tend to overestimate the influence of personality (dispositional factors) and underestimate the impact of situational influences, particularly when explaining others’ behaviors = Fundamental Attribution Error

2) **Fundamental Attribution Error** – tendency for observers, when analyzing the others’ behavior, to underestimate the impact of the situation and to overestimate the impact of a personal disposition

   a. We overestimate the influence of personality and underestimate the influence of situations

   b. **Fundamental Attribution Error** – our tendency to underestimate the impact of situations and to overestimate the impact of personal dispositions upon the behavior of others;

      1. Widespread tendency to overemphasize dispositional factors and to underestimate situational factors when making attributions about the cause of another person’s behavior

      2. **Dispositional Factors**: include personality traits, such as level of motivation & willingness to work

      3. **Situational Factors**: refer to social influences, such as the absence of parents or group pressures to conform

   c. We are less likely to make this Fundamental Attribution Error when:

      1. explaining our own behavior, or

      2. when we take another’s perspective
When explaining our own behavior, we make certain attributions (or explanations) that are either situational or dispositional:

1. **Optimists** – more likely to attribute good events to dispositions and bad events to situations

2. **Pessimists** – more likely to suffer depression, will make dispositional attributions for bad events and situational attributions for good events

3) **Causes:**

   a. **Just-World-Phenomenon**: most people have a need to believe that the world is just & fair, as a result, they believe that people generally get what they deserve

   1. **Just World Phenomenon** helps explain the tendency of people to blame the victim rather than to look at social causes

   b. **Saliency Bias**: Situational factors are less salient or noticeable than dispositional factors, as a result, people focus on visible personality traits rather than the less visible social context

4) **Examples:**

   a. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastate the Gulf Coast claiming almost 2,000 lives in New Orleans alone.

   - Why did so many residents of New Orleans fail to evacuate the city?

   - Many critics ignored situational factors – shortage of public transportation – and instead focused on dispositional factors- residents who foolishly ignored warnings to evacuate the city

   b. As you are driving down the road, another car suddenly passes you and speeds through the red light. Most people make the fundamental attribution error by attributing the driver’s reckless behavior to dispositional factors, such as drunk driving or aggressive behavior. Few people pause to consider that situational factors may be at work- the driver may be ill and rushing to a nearby hospital.

5) **Consequences/Effects of Attribution:**

   a. Our attributions have important practical (real-world/useful) consequences

   1. Ex: A hurtful remark from an acquaintance is going to be more likely forgiven if it is attributed to a temporary situation than to a mean disposition

   b. **Social**: a jury must decide whether a shooting was malicious or in self-defense; an unhappy wife & husband each ponder why the other behaves so selfishly; an interviewer must judge whether the applicants geniality is genuine

   1. Happily married couples attribute their spouse’s tart-tongued remark to a temporary situation, “She must have had a bad day at work”

   2. Unhappily married persons attribute the same remark to a mean disposition, “why did I marry such a hostile person?”

   c. **Political**: there are political implications to the question of whether people’s behavior is attributed to social conditions or to their own choices, abilities, and shortcomings.

   d. How do you explain poverty or unemployment?
6) **False Consensus Effect**: tendency to overestimate the extent to which others share our beliefs & our behaviors;
   
   a. People tend to see their foibles & attitudes in others, a phenomenon Freud called projection, and today’s researchers call the **false consensus effect**.
   
   b. Examples:
      1. People who cheat on their taxes or break speed limits tend to think many others do likewise;
      2. People who are happy, kind, and trustworthy, tend to see others as the same.

7) **The Self Serving Bias**:
   
   a. **Self-serving bias** – most people take credit for their successes while at the same time attributing their failures to external situations beyond their control
   
   b. Causes:
      1. Most people are motivated by a need for self-esteem and a desire to save face
      2. Individuals are more aware of the situational factors that influence their behavior
   
   c. Examples:
      1. Students who earn high scores on the SAT & ACT attribute their success to dispositional factors, such as hard work & extensive practice. Students who earn low SAT & ACT scores blame situational factors such as inept teachers, poor test-taking conditions, & tricky questions.
      2. Stockbrokers who produce high returns for their clients attribute their success to dispositional factors, such as exhaustive research & disciplined investing. Stockbrokers who produce low returns for their clients blame situational factors, such as unpredictable actions by foreign governments and surprise decisions by the Federal Reserve Board.

8) Cultural & Attributional Biases:
   
   a. **Individualistic Cultures**: like the US & Canada – emphasize independence & personal responsibility
      
      1. People in individualistic cultures are more likely to commit both the fundamental attribution error & the self-serving bias
   
   b. **Collectivistic Cultures**: like Japan & China – emphasize inter-dependence and collective responsibility
      
      1. People in collectivistic cultures are less likely to make the fundamental attribution error and more likely to be aware of how situational factors influence behavior

**NOTE**: **Fundamental attribution error** & the **self-serving bias** have generated more multiple-choice questions than any other social psychology concepts.

Questions typically ask you to apply these concepts to a situation from everyday life.

**Ex**: When students attribute their high history grades to hours of extra study and their low chemistry grades to impossible test questions, they are exhibiting the **self-serving bias**.
B. Attitudes & Actions:

1) **Attitudes** – a positive, neutral, or negative evaluation of a person, issue, or object; a belief and feeling that predisposes our reactions to objects, people, and events
   
a. Attitudes predispose our reacts to people, issues, or objects

2) Attitudes Affect Actions:
   
a. Advertising is ALL based on attitude formation:
   
b. **Mere Exposure Effect:**
   
   1. Mere Exposure Effect – the more you are exposed to something, the more you will like it; repeated exposure increases our attraction:
      
      ● “Familiarity breeds liking/content”
   
c. Person communicating the message can influence your attitude:
   
   1. Attractive (hot) people are more persuasive communicators
      
      ● 1 – “I want to be like them”
      
      ● 2 – “I want to be with them”
   
d. More educated the audience, the less persuaded by advertisements
   
   1. Less educated audience – a one sided message works best
   
   2. More educated audience – communication that acknowledges & refutes opposing arguments will be more effective

  e. **Central Route v. Peripheral Route:**

   1. Central Route to Persuasion: When people focus on factual information, logical arguments, and a thoughtful analysis of pertinent details;
      
      ● Offers evidence & arguments that aim to trigger favorable thoughts; occurs mostly when people are naturally analytical or involved in the issue;
      
      ● More thoughtful & less superficial, it is more durable & more likely to influence behavior
      
      ● Central route is more direct, focusing on the heart of issue being discussed. The issues are the heart (or center) of the matter!
      
      ● EX: A car buyer bases her decision on such factual factors as a car’s gas mileage, its rating by outside experts, the quality of airbags, antilock brakes, seatbelts, and other safety features.
      
      ● EX: Environmental advocates may show us evidence of rising temperatures, melting glaciers, rising seas, and northward shifts in vegetation and animal life
2. **Peripheral Route to Persuasion**: When people focus on emotional appeals and incidental cues;

- Doesn’t engage systematic thinking, but does produce fast results as people respond to incidental cues (such as endorsements by respected people) and make snap judgements

- **Peripheral route** is more indirect, focusing on things that really may not have any direct connection to the issue at hand (Remember *peripheral vision* = our vision of things on the outer edge of the visual field)

- **EX**: A car buyer bases her decision on such incidental factors as the likeability of the car dealer, the car's color, and catchy sales slogans.

- **EX**: A perfume ad may lure us with images of beautiful or famous people in love

### f. The Looking Glass Effect:

- when we are aware of our attitudes, we are more likely to allow them to guide our actions; researchers have made participants more aware by installing mirrors in the laboratory – this is referred to as the looking glass effect

1. Edward Diener & Mark Wallbom noted that nearly all college students say cheating is morally wrong. They asked students to work on an anagram-solving task that the students presumed was an IQ test. They told them to stop when a bell sounded.

- Left alone – 71% cheated by working past the bell.

- For students working in front of a mirror – only 7% cheated!

2. Bushman found that people who can see their own reflections eat less unhealthy food than those who can’t see themselves.

- He asked college students to try regular, low-fat, and fat-free cream cheese.

- Participants in a room with a mirror ate less of the regular spread than did those in a room with no mirror!

### 3) Attitudes guide our actions: (attitudes predict behavior):

a. When outside influences on what we say and do are minimal

b. When the attitude is specifically relevant to the behavior

c. When we are aware of our attitudes

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**Do attitudes tell us about someone’s behavior?**

d. Attitudes tend to predict behaviors when:

1. The attitude is strong (e.g., if we strongly support one presidential candidate, we may volunteer on his or her campaign).

2. We are free to behave in a variety of ways, as opposed to when we have limited options (e.g., if we enjoy tennis, we may play tennis over summer vacation)
e. LaPiere’s Study:

1. It used to be assumed that if you knew someone’s attitude, then you could predict their behavior. In other words, if I knew that Ginger hated video games, then I could predict that she would not buy an X-Box (but who would with a PS3 out there).

2. However, researcher LaPiere in the 1930’s showed us that the relationship was not as clear.

3. LaPiere was examining prejudice against Asians in the United States:
   - He traveled with an Asian couple around the country and watched how they were treated.
   - Only on one occasion was the couple treated badly due to their race.
   - After the trip, LaPiere contacted all of the establishments they had visited and asked about their attitudes towards Asian patrons - Over 90% of the respondents said they would NOT serve Asians
   - The finding illustrates that attitudes do not perfectly predict behaviors.

4. There has been much research on the attitude-behavior link since the 1930s, when LaPiere (1934) found that attitudes are not always good indicators of how people will behave in a given situation.

5. LaPiere’s study compared a general attitude with a specific behavior. For more reliable correlations, general attitudes should be matched to general behaviors (or, specific attitudes should be matched to specific behaviors).

4) Actions Affect Attitudes:

   a. Attitudes follow behavior

   b. Actions/ behaviors can influence our attitudes

   c. Persuasion Strategies:

      1. Foot-in-the-door Phenomenon- tendency for people who agree to a small request to comply later with a larger one. (Make small request- they agree- make larger request)

         - Foot in the door phenomenon: persuasion strategy of getting a person to agree to a modest first request as a set-up for a later, much larger, request

         - Suggests that if you get people to agree to a small request, they will become more likely to agree to follow-up requests that are much larger.

         - EX: A car dealer persuades you to buy a car with upgraded seats and then convinces you to buy the car with a complete upgraded interior.

         - EX: Another common example of foot-in-the-door phenomenon occurs when volunteers ask you to sign a petition and then follow-up with a request for a donation to their cause.

         - EX: You want to borrow $500 for a PS3 (well worth it) from your Mom. You ask her for $25 and she says yes. Since she said OK to $25, she is more likely to say yes to $50 tomorrow and so on.
2. **Door-in-the-Face Phenomenon**: tendency for people who first say no to a large request, to comply later with a smaller one (Make large request – they decline/say no – make smaller request)

   - This strategy argues that after people refuse a large request, they will look more favorable upon a follow up request that seems small in comparison.

   - EX: You ask your Mom for $15,000 for a new car and when she says "you must be on drugs!!", you say, "fine, just get me a PS3 instead"

3. **Norms of reciprocity**: it is common courtesy to think that when someone does something nice for you, it is your duty to do something nice in return.

   - EX: Here you make your Mom dinner, then ask her for the PS3.

   - EX: Charities always send me free stuff in the mail (like personalized mailing labels and bookmarks) hoping I will feel the norms of reciprocity and send them money. They just don't know me so well.....damn charitable organizations- they ain't gettin my money.

4. **Low-Ball technique**: students were asked to participate in a lab experiment at 7AM, only 24% showed up. When students agreed to participate without knowing the time and then were informed of the early hour, 53% showed up!

5. **Brainwashing**: During the Korean War, American POWs were forced by their captors to write a series of essays, each subsequent essay representing a more serious attack on the US government. Slowly, each writer’s attitude tended to change, becoming more consistent with his words

6. **Write-it-down Technique**: Once a customer fills out a sales agreement, he or she commits to the purchase

7. **“Fifty-words-or less” Testimonials**: Manufacturers of toothpaste, breakfast cereal, and chewing gum typically get consumers to compose a short personal statement that begins, “Why I like ...” Saying is believing!

Actions/behaviors can influence our attitudes:

   d. **Role**: a set of expectations (norms) about a social position, defining how those in the position out to behave; social prescriptions

   1. When you adopt a new role – when you leave middle school and start high school, become a college student, or begin a new job – you strive to follow the social prescriptions

   - At first, your behaviors may feel phony, b/c you are acting a role;

   2. People who play a role tend to adjust their attitudes to coincide with behavior enacted while playing the role.

   - We adopt a new role, “college student”, “marry”, “begin a new job”, you strive to follow the social prescriptions (instructions, guidelines for how you should act), at first you are just acting, but then you become that role.

   3. EX: **Zimbardo’s Prison Study** (1972) – p. 758
e. **Cognitive Dissonance Theory** - when our thoughts and behaviors don’t coincide, we experience tension. To relieve this tension, we bring our attitudes into line with our actions. (dissonance = “lack of harmony”)

1. **Theory of cognitive dissonance** was first proposed by Leon Festinger, a research psychologist at Stanford

2. **Cognitive Dissonance** – is the state of psychological tension, anxiety, and discomfort that occurs when an individual’s attitude and behavior are inconsistent.
   - Festinger explained that, “if a person is induced to do or say something that is contrary to his private opinion, there will be a tendency for him to change his opinion to bring it into correspondence with what he has said or done”
   - Humans are motivated to reduce the tensions resulting form inconsistent attitudes and actions.
   - Although it is possible to reduce dissonance by changing either one’s behavior or one’s attitude, most people modify their attitudes

3. People want to have consistent attitudes and behaviors....when they are not they experience dissonance (unpleasant tension).

4. Usually they will change their attitude.

5. Examples:
   - Kristin is aware that smoking is harmful to her health. According to cognitive dissonance theory, Kristin will most likely resolve the tension between her attitude and her behavior by denying the relationship between smoking and lung cancer or rationalizing that smoking is a social activity that helps her fit in.
   - Austin impulsively buys an expensive pair of sneakers that he really cannot afford. He then rationalizes the purchase by insisting that the shoes were a good buy and they will improve his basketball performance.
Review Attribution, Attitudes, & Actions:

1. Psychologists who study how we think about, influence, & relate to one another are called: social psychologists

2. Heider’s theory of how we explain others’ behavior is the attribution theory.
   - According to this theory, we attribute behavior either to an internal cause, which is called a dispositional attribution.
   - or to an external cause, which is called a situational attribution.

3. Most people tend to underestimate the extent to which people’s actions are influenced by social situations because their attention is focused on the person. This tendency is called the fundamental attribution error.
   - When explaining our own behavior, or that of someone we know well, this tendency is weaker.
   - When observers view the world from others’ perspectives, attributions are reversed.
   - Example of practical consequences of attribution:
     - A hurtful remark from an acquaintance is going to be more likely forgiven if it is attributed to a temporary situation than to a mean disposition.

4. Beliefs & feelings that predispose our responses are called: attitudes

5. The many research studies on attitudes and actions conducted during the 1960s challenged the common assumption that our actions are guided by our attitudes.

6. Attitudes predict our actions:
   - 1- when other influences on the attitudes and actions are minimized,
   - 2- when the attitude is specifically relevant to the behavior
   - 3- when we are especially aware of our attitudes

7. Thus, our attitudes are more likely to predict behavior:
   - When we are not attempting to adjust our behavior to please others
   - When we are in familiar situations in which we don’t have to stop and think about our attitudes
   - When the attitude pertains to a specific behavior, such as purchasing a product or casting a vote

8. Many research studies demonstrate that our attitudes are strongly influenced by our actions or behavior:
   - One example of this is the tendency for people who agree to a small request to comply later with a larger one: this is the foot-in-the-door phenomenon

9. When you follow the social prescriptions for how you should act as, say, a college student, you are adopting a role

10. Taking on a set of behavior, or acting in a certain way, generally changes people’s attitudes.

11. According to Cognitive dissonance theory, thoughts and feelings change b/c people are motivated to justify actions that would otherwise seem hypocritical. This theory was proposed by Leon Festinger.

12. Dissonance theory predicts that people induced (without coercion) to behave contrary to their true attitudes will be motivate to reduce the resulting dissonance by changing their attitudes.
We conducted a variation of Asch’s (1951) conformity study in which participants made judgments about the length of lines. We randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions and told them that the study involved perceptual abilities. In the first condition, participants estimated the length of lines after hearing five people pretending to be participants (confederates) give inaccurate estimates. In the second condition, participants estimated the length of lines without hearing estimates of confederates. As we expected, participants in the first condition were less accurate in their estimates of line length, demonstrating the tendency to conform to majority influence.

How might participants’ estimates of line length in the study be related to the following?

• **Cognitive dissonance:**

To score this point, students must describe

a. A tension or discomfort created when a participant questions his or her own estimate of line length in light of the confederates’ responses, or

b. Conflicting (accept mismatched, discrepant, different, etc.) thoughts within a participant or between a participant’s thoughts and behaviors (“The thoughts of the participants conflicted with the length estimates they gave”).

Note:

- Do not score the point if the student describes a conflict between a participant and confederates (“Dissonance occurs when a participant disagrees with the confederates about line length”), because cognitive dissonance is intrapersonal, not interpersonal.