



## Attribution

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# Attribution

## ❖ Understanding the Causes of Behavior

- Someone close to you starts avoiding you
- You face an interview and you are selected without answering many questions
- You ask a question and your professor does not give any kind of response
- You propose to someone and .....

## ❖ We want to understand

- Why someone says or does certain things
- What kind of person is someone—what are their traits, motives, and goals?
- ❖ Basic desire to understand cause-and-effect relationships in the social world

## ❖ Attribution

- ❖ The process through which we seek to identify the causes of others' behavior and so gain knowledge of their stable traits and dispositions

# Correspondent Inference

Jones and Davis (1965)



❖ A theory describing how we use others' behavior as a basis for inferring their stable dispositions

❖ Attribution

- ❖ External (situational)
- ❖ Internal (dispositional)

$\text{Behavior} = \text{Situation} + \text{Disposition}$

$D = \text{Behavior} - \text{Situation}$

❖ Three Cues

- ❖ Is freely chosen
- ❖ Noncommon effects (distinctive)
- ❖ Is low in social desirability or otherwise violates social norms



# Correspondent Bias

Jones and Harris (1967)

## ❖ Castro's rule in Cuba

- ❖ In one condition, participants were told that the essay writer had free choice of position.
- ❖ On another condition, they were told that the writer was instructed to create the essay in a pro-Castro or anti-Castro manner
  
- ❖ Participants were asked to estimate the essay writer's true beliefs. - judgments of another's personality and attitudes on the basis of very limited information
  - ❖ Free Choice Conditions:
    - Pro-Castro Essayist: Attributed attitude = 59.6
    - Anti-Castro Essayist: Attributed attitude = 17.4
  
  - ❖ No Choice Conditions:
    - Pro-Castro Essayist: Attributed attitude = 44.1
    - Anti-Castro Essayist: Attributed attitude = 22.9



# Correspondent Bias

Jones and Harris (1967)

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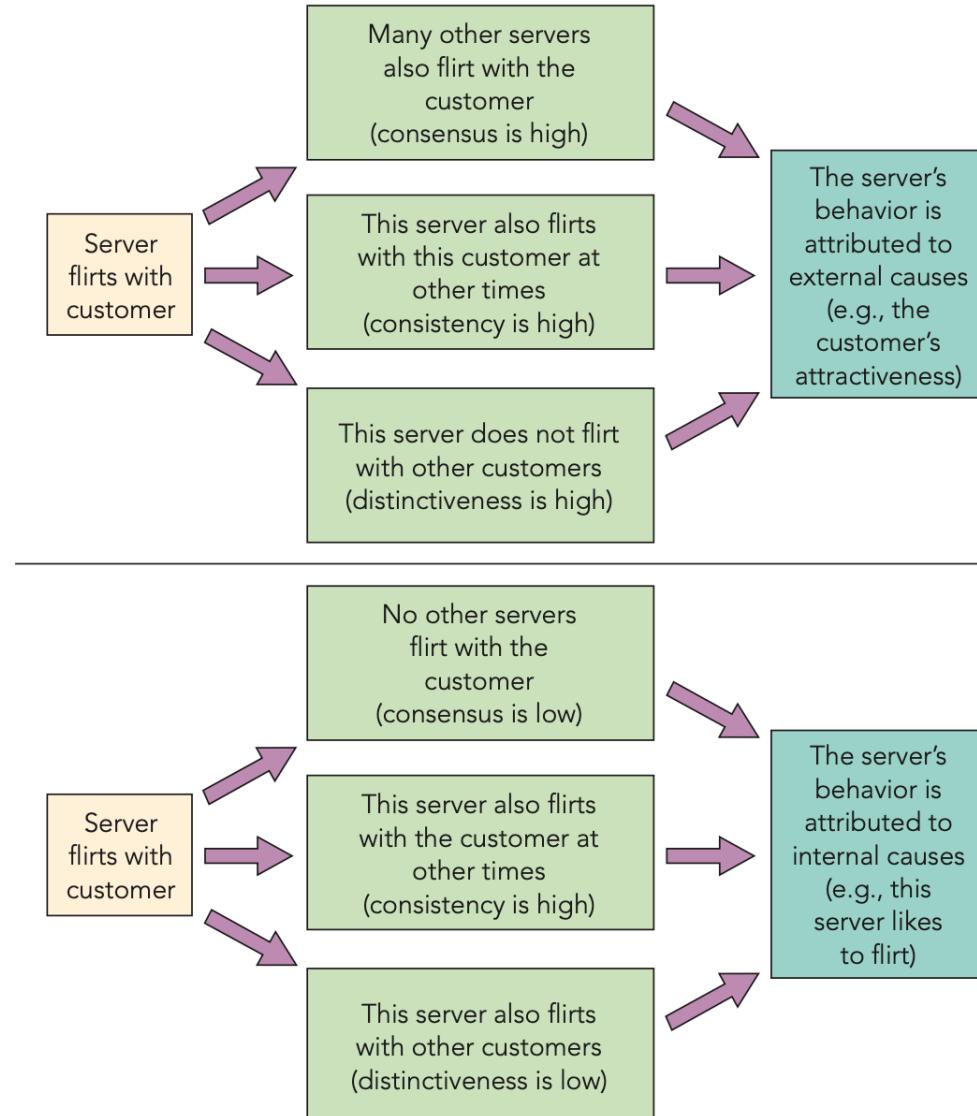
- ❖ People did not correct their inference about the writer even though they were aware of the situational constraint faced by writer
  - ❖ The tendency for people to over-emphasize dispositional or personality-based explanations for behaviors observed in others while under-emphasizing situational explanations.
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- ❖ The Fundamental attribution error
  - ❖ Correspondence bias
  - ❖ Over-attribution effect

# **Kelly's Covariation Theory**



- ❖ How we answer – “Why” a behavior occurs
    - ❖ **Consensus**
      - The extent to which other people react to a given stimulus or event in the same manner as the person we are evaluating.
    - ❖ **Consistency**
      - The extent to which the person in question reacts to the stimulus or event in the same way on other occasions, over time.
    - ❖ **Distinctiveness**
      - The extent to which the person reacts in the same manner to other, different stimuli or events.
  - ❖ *Internal attribution*
    - ❖ conditions in which consensus and distinctiveness are low, but consistency is high.
  - ❖ *External attribution*
    - ❖ consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness are all high.

# Kelly's Covariation Theory



# Other dimensions of Causal Attribution



## ❖ Stable factors

- ❖ Are the causal factors that influenced their behavior likely to be stable over time, or are those factors likely to change?
  - Personality traits and temperament - tend to be quite stable over time
  - Factors such as *motives, health, and fatigue* can change over time
  -

## ❖ Controllable factors

- ❖ Can individuals change or influence them if they wish to do so
  - Individuals can, if they wish, learn to hold
    - Laws or social norms that define how we should behave in various situations

## ❖ Attribution

- ❖ Internal-external,
- ❖ Stable-unstable
- ❖ Controllable-uncontrollable



# Action identification

- ❖ Our interpretation of actions is different
  - ❖ Someone is putting change in jar
- ❖ The interpretation we place on an act—in terms of differing degrees of abstraction—is known as action identification.
  - ❖ Low abstraction
    - When we view others' actions concretely, involving little more than the actions themselves, we also tend to make few attributions about their intentions or higher-order cognition.
  - ❖ High abstraction
    - Action has greater meaning, we attribute much greater mental activity to them. The action reflects much more—the person's goals, characteristics, and intentions—their mind,



# Actor-Observer effect

## ❖ Example

- ❖ When we see another person trip and fall, we tend to attribute it to his or her clumsiness.
- ❖ If we trip, however, we are more likely to attribute our fall to situational causes

## ❖ Internal attributions

- ❖ We don't tend to "overattribute" our own actions to internal causes
- ❖ Tendency to attribute our own behaviour to situational (external) causes
- ❖ But the behavior of others to dispositional (internal) causes.

# Self-Serving Bias



## ❖ Example

- ❖ Your professor tells you
    - “An outstanding paper—one of the best I’ve seen in years. A+”
  - ❖ To what would you attribute this success
    - When you got F grade – “one of the worst I’ve seen in years”

## ❖ This tendency to attribute

- Our own positive outcomes to internal causes
  - Negative outcomes to external factors

❖ Known as the self-serving bias

## ❖ Why

- ❖ The cognitive model
  - ❖ The motivational explanation

