

Lecture Outline: Error & Bias

1. Bem vs. Festinger revisited

Post-identification
feedback effect

2. Attributional Biases

Fundamental Attribution
Error

Actor Observer Effect

Self-Serving Bias

Ultimate Attribution
Error

False Consensus Effect

3. Individual Differences

Locus of Control

Bem vs. Festinger

Zanna & Cooper (1974):

Pitted self-perception theory against
cognitive dissonance theory

Cognitive dissonance theory supported
by data

Examined attitude change with clear
attitudes

People engage in self-perception
processes when attitudes not clear

Results may have been biased in favor
of cognitive dissonance theory

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Examined attitude change when
attitude not clear

Background

Post-identification feedback
effect

- A witness' confidence that s/he correctly identified the real perpetrator is increased by feedback from another person that she/he got the right person.

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

1. Witnesses view a line-up

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

2. Witnesses identify who they believe the real perpetrator is

- Sometimes real perpetrator is in the line-up
 - correct identification typical

- Other times real perpetrator is not in the line-up
 - incorrect identification typical

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

3. Police give witnesses confirming feedback: "You got the right one!"

- Feedback increases confidence that real perpetrator was identified
 - post-identification feedback effect

- Police/lawyers more likely to charge suspect if witnesses are confident

Post Identification
Feedback Study

Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Purpose of study:

- Examine why confirming feedback increases confidence

Prediction:

- Witnesses infer confidence from confirming feedback because actual confidence unclear

Attitude = Confidence

Behavior = Feedback

Post Identification
Feedback Study

Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Procedures:

Watched a gunman kill a security guard

Showed line-up

Identified who they believed was the real murderer

Real murderer not in line-up

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Experimental Manipulation:

No-Thought Condition

- Identified suspect from line-up
- Feedback given
- Rated confidence at time of identification

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Experimental Manipulation
(con't):

Prior-Thought Condition

- Identified suspect from line-up
- Privately thought about confidence at time of identification
- Feedback given
- Rated confidence at time of identification

Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

What is the difference
between conditions

?

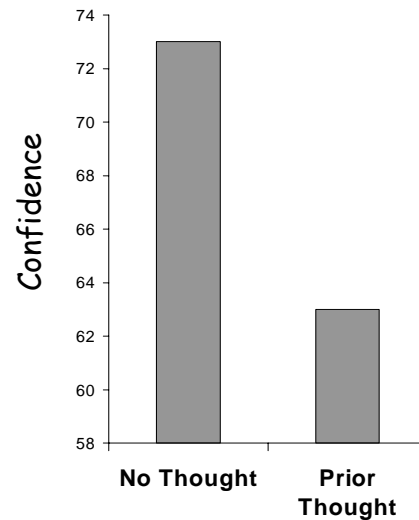
Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Prior thought manipulated clarity
of attitude (confidence)

- No prior thought = unclear attitude
- Prior thought = clear attitude

According to self-perception
theory, who should be most
influenced by the feedback?

Post-Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield
(1999)



Post Identification
Feedback Study
Wells & Bradfield (1999)

Consistent with self-perception theory:

- Participants inferred attitude (confidence) from behavior (feedback) when attitude was not clear (no prior thought condition)

Fundamental Attribution Error

Definition:

- Underestimate influence of situational factors on others' behavior
- Overestimate influence of dispositional factors on others behavior

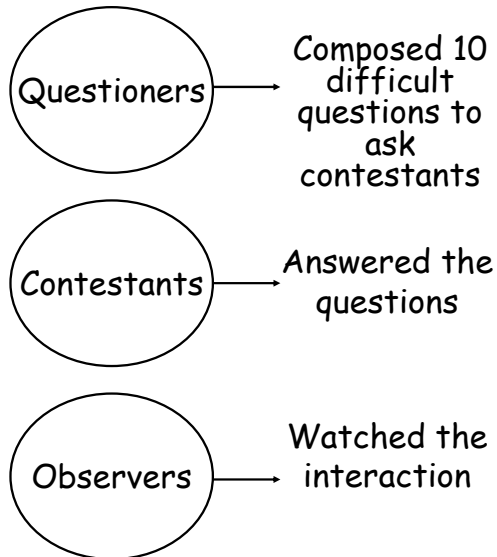
The Quiz Game Study

Ross, Amabile & Steinmetz (1977)

Three groups of participants

- Questioners
- Contestants
- Observers

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)



The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Procedures:

Participants played their role

- asking questions
- answering questions
- observing interaction

Participants then rated the general knowledge of questioner & contestant

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Fundamental Attribution Error:

- Underestimate influence of situational factors on behavior
- Overestimate influence of dispositional factors on behavior

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Prediction:

Rate questioners' general knowledge higher than contestants general knowledge

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Results:

Contestants and observers
rated questioner more
knowledgeable than
contestants

Role of Rater	Rating of Questioner	Rating of Contestant
Contestant	67	41
Observer	83	49

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Conclusion:

Behavior attributed to
dispositional qualities

Behavior not attributed to
participants' role in study

Fits the FAE

Overestimate dispositional factors

Underestimate situational factors

Fundamental Attribution Error

Why do people fall prey to the FAE?

- Others' behavior very salient
- Situation faced by others not as salient

Fundamental Attribution Error is robust, but not universal

- Not evident in young children
- More evident in Western cultures
- More likely under some conditions

Actor-Observer Effect

Definition:

- Tendency to attribute own behavior to situational factors, but others' behavior to their disposition
- Attributing others' behavior to their disposition = FAE
- Attributing own behavior to situational factors is what is added

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Participants fell prey to the
Fundamental Attribution Error

- Contestants and Observers rated Questioners as having more general knowledge than the contestants

Results also showed the Actor-
Observer Effect

- Contestants saw own general knowledge more similar to Questioners' than did Observers

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Contestants saw own general
knowledge more similar to
Questioners' than did Observers

Role of Rater	Rating of Questioner	Rating of Contestant
Contestant	67	41
Observer	83	49

Contestants more sensitive to
role than were observers

Fits A-O Effect

The Quiz Game Study (Ross et al., 1977)

Additional Finding:

Questioners' were most
sensitive to role

- Rated own general knowledge
equal to that of Contestants

Role of Rater	Rating of Questioner	Rating of Contestant
Contestant	67	41
Observer	83	49
Questioner	54	51

Actor-Observer Effect

Why do people fall prey to the Actor-
Observer Effect?

See self behave differently
across wide variety of
situations

Self-Serving Attribution Bias

Definition:

- Tendency to attribute own positive behavior to dispositional qualities, but own negative behavior to situational

Taking responsibility for positive behavior

- Self-enhancing bias

Denying responsibility for negative behavior

- Self-protective bias

Self-Serving Attribution Bias

Causes: *Cognitive and Motivational*

Cognitive

- People expect to succeed AND tend to attribute internal causes to expected events

Motivational

- People want to feel good about self

Self-Serving Attribution Bias

Assumptions of Motivational Cause

- Attributional style related to self-esteem
- Lower self-esteem people hold more realistic views of self than high self-esteem people
- Lewinsohn et al. (1980) tested second assumption

The Depression Study

Lewinsohn et al., 1980

Prediction:

Low self-esteem people hold more realistic self-views because they do not engage in self-serving biases as much

The Depression Study

Lewinsohn et al., 1980

Prediction with Depressives

- Depressives more realistic self-views than non-depressives
- Depressives develop more unrealistic self-views as depression lifts

The Depression Study

Lewinsohn et al., 1980

Participants:

Depressives
Psychiatric patients
Normals

Procedures:

Group interacted
Rated own and others' social competence

The Depression Study

Lewinsohn et al., 1980

Results:

- Depressives rated self as less socially competent and others agreed
Realistic self-view
- Non-Depressed rated self as more socially competent than others rated them
Unrealistic self-view
- Over course of treatment, depressives increasingly rated self more socially competent than others rated them
Unrealistic self-view

Ultimate Attribution Error

Parallels Self-Serving Bias, but at level of social groups

In-Group

Positive Beh = dispositional cause

Negative Beh = situational cause

Out-Group

Positive Beh = situational cause

Negative Beh = dispositional cause

Ultimate Attribution Error

Primary Cause

Help people maintain positive feelings about in-group in comparison to out-group

Ultimate Attribution Error Study Chatman & von Hippel (2001)

Focused on Negative Behaviors

Participants:

- African American and White

Procedures:

- Approached on campus
- Read an applicant's job application

Ultimate Attribution Error Study
Chatman & von Hippel (2001)

Applicant was:

African American OR White
(in-group or out-group to
participant)

Applicant was:

Fired from last job

Participants asked:

Why applicant lost job
If cause due to situation or
disposition

Ultimate Attribution Error Study
Chatman & von Hippel (2001)

Prediction:
African American Participants

African American
job applicant

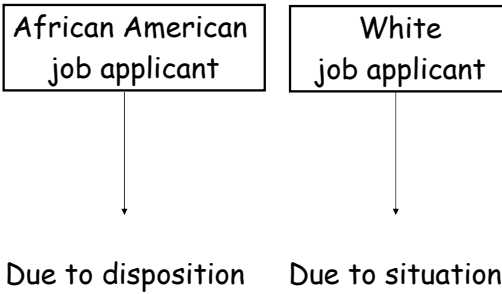
White
job applicant

↓
Due to situation

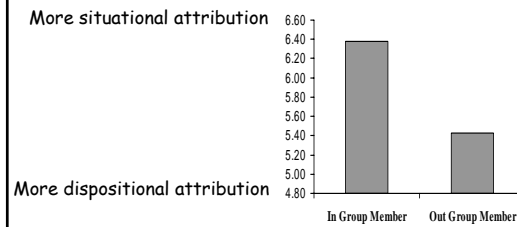
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Due to disposition

Ultimate Attribution Error Study Chatman & von Hippel (2001)

Prediction:
White Participants



Ultimate Attribution Error Study Chatman & von Hippel (2001)



False Consensus Effect

Definition:

Tendency to assume others are more similar to oneself than is really true

- Drinkers should have overestimated percentage of students who drink in comparison to non-drinkers
- Pot smokers should have overestimated students who smoke pot in comparison to non-pot smokers

The Sign Study

Ross, Greene, & House
(1977)

Purpose:

Demonstrate false consensus effect

Prediction:

Participants would assume others would behave the same as them

The Sign Study

Ross, Greene, & House
(1977)

Procedures:

Participants came to lab

Asked if they would wear sign
around campus and watch
reactions of others

Told did not have to do it

After participants made choice,
they rated how many other
students made the same choice
as them

The Sign Study

Ross, Greene, & House
(1977)

Results:

50% said they would wear sign

50% said they would not

Estimate

Wear Sign: 63% would 37% wouldn't

Not Wear Sign: 23% would 77% wouldn't

Overestimated how many others
would behave as they did

Causes of False Consensus Effect

Motivational:

Justifies one's own beliefs and behaviors as good and right

Cognitive:

Unsure about others' beliefs/behaviors AND use own as estimate

Hang out with similar others, so they come to mind more easily

Individual Differences in Attributional Biases

Not all people engage in biases to same extent

Locus of Control

Internals: tend to attribute causes to internal factors

Externals: Tend to attribute causes to external factors

Implications

Actor-Observer Effect:

- Internals less likely to attribute own behavior to situational factors
- Externals more likely attribute behavior to situational factors

Implications

Self-Serving Bias:

- Internals more likely to accept responsibility for failure whereas externals less likely to accept responsibility for failure
- Internals more likely to accept responsibility for success whereas externals less likely to accept responsibility for success