PSYC 325 Fundamentals of Social Psychology

Chapter 4: Social Perception
How We Come to Understand Other People

How to Begin People Watching

Edit Article

? Questions and Answers

People watching involves observing people to get a feel for the beauty and rhythm of the community around us. Watching people is amazing. You can have some of the funniest laughs ever with you and your friends, especially in a place full of bad scruffs. For some people watchers, it's about creativity, using the moments of watching in trying to guess at another person's story just from mere observation, and embracing the fun of what is, in effect, an amateur social science.

People watchers observe speech in action, relationship interactions, body language, and activities; it's also common to include listening in to conversations. Indeed, all the senses can be put to good use when people watching, even down to trying to guess a person's perfume or aftershave as they walk by. Here are some suggestions for enjoying the art of people watching.

Steps

2 **Practice naturalistic observation not intrusive nosiness.** Naturalistic observation is the practice of observing subjects in their natural habitat.[2] This means being unobtrusive, unnoticed, and non-interfering. The moment you become any of these things, the spell is broken and you've interacted and it's no longer "people watching".

Steps

3 **Select a location to watch from.** The tried and true locale is sitting in a cafe looking out on a busy street. This is the classic Parisian positioning and even if it's cold, find yourself a suitably large and clean window to peer through. There are plenty of other options though, including:

Steps

4 **Stay unobtrusive.** The important thing is to place yourself somewhere that you won't look conspicuous. This means making it appear that you're already occupied and not simply staring at people:

Source: http://www.wikihow.com/Begin-People-Watching

Outline

Social Perception

- Nonverbal Behaviour

- Implicit Personality Theories:
  – Filling in the Blanks

- Causal Attribution:
  – Answering the "Why" Question

Social Perception

- Defined as the study of how we form impressions of other people and make inferences about them

- An important source of information about other people is their nonverbal behaviour

First Impressions

- Notoriously inaccurate
- Why?
  - Selective attention
  - Point of focus → on own traits, motives, desires
  - Values over competence
 - Negativity effect

Nonverbal Behaviour

- **Nonverbal communication**:
  - The way in which people communicate, intentionally or unintentionally, without words

- **Nonverbal cues**:
  - Include facial expressions, tones of voice, gestures, body position and movement, the use of touch, and eye gaze

Nonverbal Behaviour

- Primary Uses:
  - Expressing emotion
  - Conveying attitudes
  - Communicating personality (and traits)
  - Facilitate verbal communication
  - Repeat or complement verbal messages
  - Substitution for verbal messages

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Most significant channel of nonverbal communication

- Darwin believed that the primary emotions conveyed by the face are universal
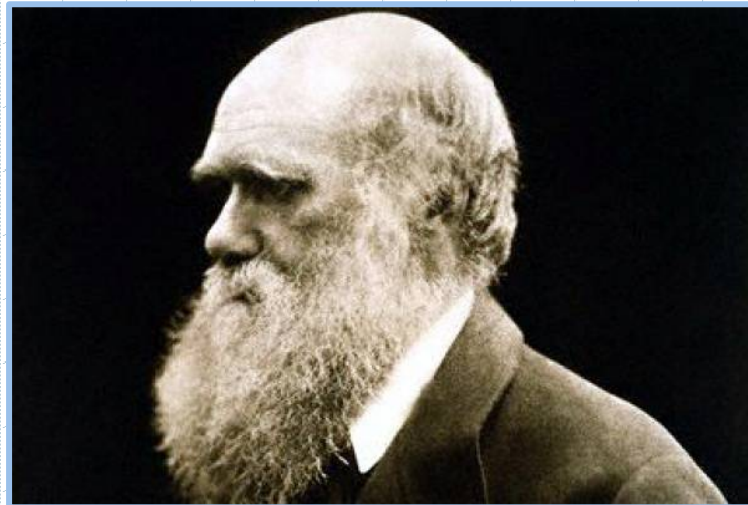
Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Darwin's Universality Hypothesis:
  - ALL humans encode (express) emotions in the same way
  - ALL humans can decode (interpret) emotions with equal accuracy
 - Species-specific, not culture-specific

Facial Expressions of Emotion

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Encode: to express or emit nonverbal behaviour
    - e.g., smiling or patting someone on the back
- Decode: to interpret the meaning of the nonverbal behaviour other people express
    - e.g., deciding that a pat on the back is an expression of condescension and not kindness
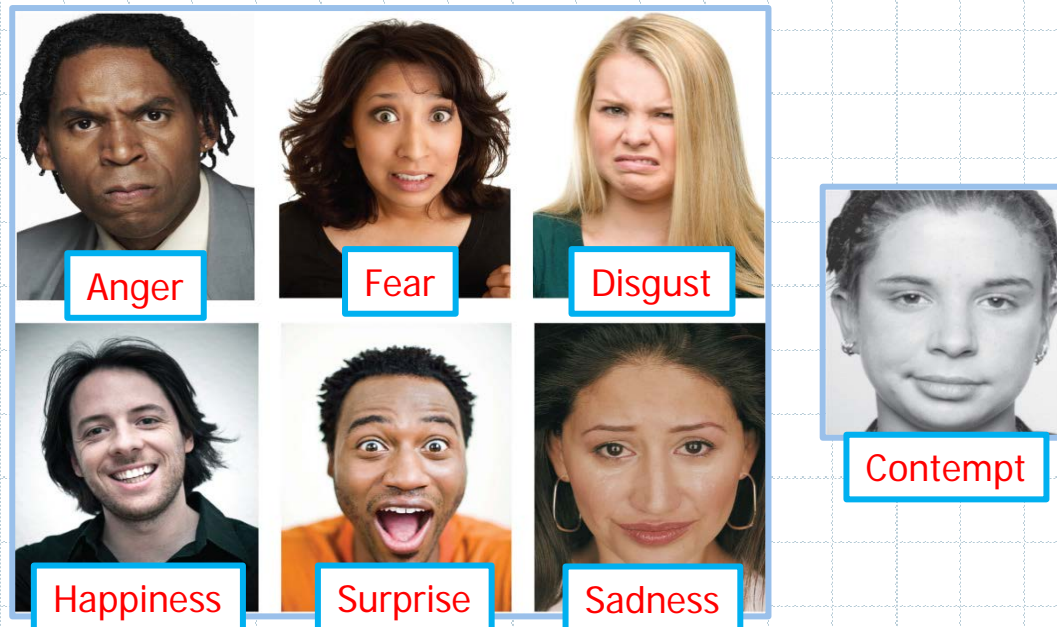
Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Cross-cultural research by Ekman et al. supports the universality of at least six facial expressions of emotion

- Others question the universal recognition of these (e.g., Russell et al., 1993)
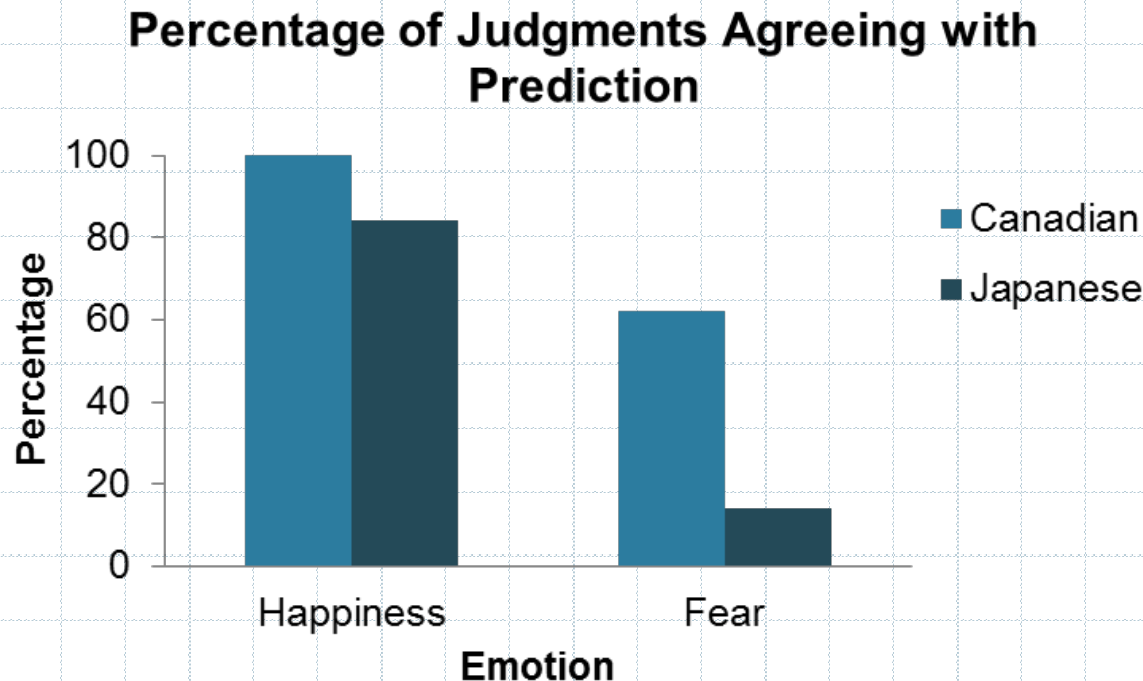
Facial Expressions of Emotion
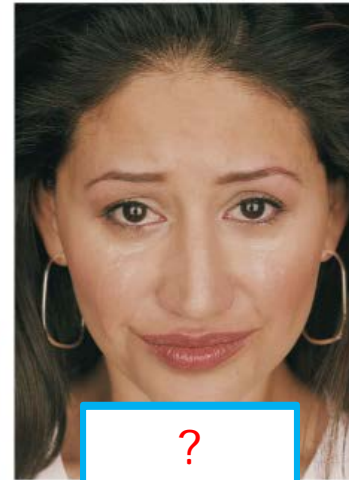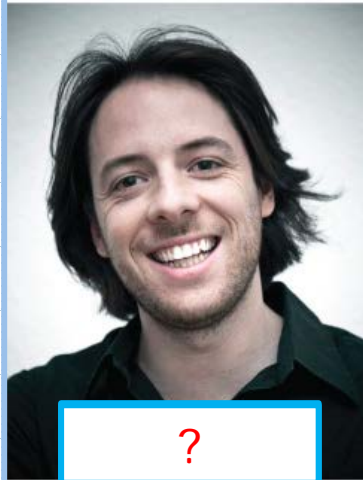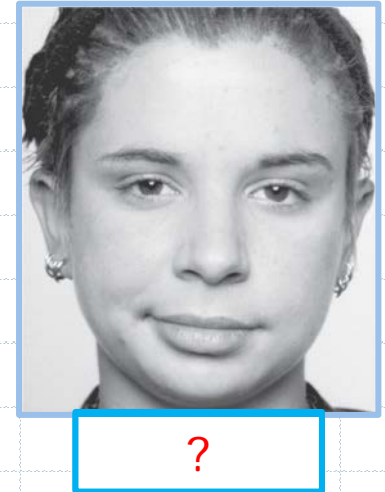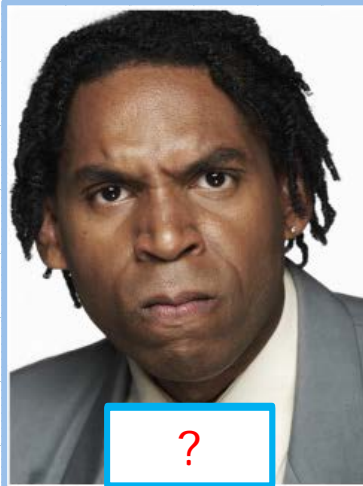
Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Universal facial expressions of emotion:
  - Anger, happiness, surprise, fear, disgust, sadness
  - Contempt and others have since been added to the list

Anger

Fear

Disgust

Contempt

Happiness

Surprise

Sadness

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Culture affects how facial expressions are interpreted (Russell et al., 1993):

Percentage of Judgments Agreeing with Prediction

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Context also plays a role:
  - Masuda et al., (2008) Assessed how Japanese and American participants interpreted the emotion of a target figure placed amongst a group of people
  - Rate 3 different emotions (happiness, anger & sadness)

Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

Rate the happiness of the target figure:

Congruent Image

Incongruent Image

Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- They hypothesized that Americans would label the central figure's emotion strictly on the basis of his own facial expression, whereas the Japanese participants would label the central figure's emotion based on the expressions of the other group members

Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Japanese participants were more influenced by the expressions of group members surrounding the target figure than Americans
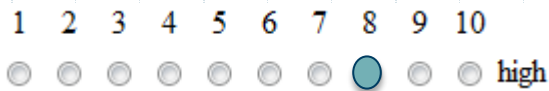
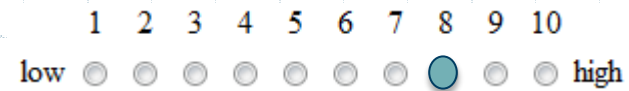**Congruent Image**   **Incongruent Image**

Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- American perceptions of emotion:

Congruent Image   **Incongruent Image**
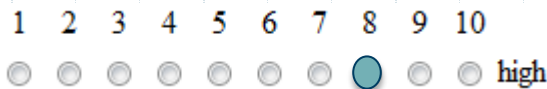

Happiness
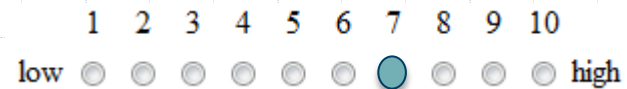
Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Japanese perceptions of emotion:

Congruent Image   **Incongruent Image**

Happiness
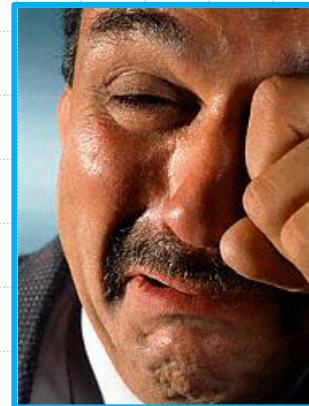
Masuda et al., 2008

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Accuracy can be <u>decreased</u> due to:
  - Display rules
    - People may try to appear less emotional
    - e.g., men & crying, women & smiling
  - Affect blends
    - People may display blends of multiple affects simultaneously
    - e.g., fear & surprise
  - Gender differences
    - e.g., women & truth, men & lies

Facial Expressions of Emotion

- Affect Blend:
  - A facial expression in which one part of the face is registering one emotion and another part of the face is registering a different emotion

Raised eyebrow

Eyes: Open wide & stare

Loosened lips

Affect blend/blended emotion

HISTORY.COM

Culture & Nonverbal Communication

- Cultural norms can influence display of emotions

- Display rules are culturally determined rules about which nonverbal behaviours are appropriate to display

 – e.g., it may be more acceptable for men to display anger than women

Culture & Nonverbal Communication

- The more individualistic a culture, the more likely that the expression of emotions is encouraged

- In collectivist cultures, the expression of strong negative emotions is discouraged because it can disrupt group harmony

Culture & Nonverbal Communication

- Emblems:
  - Nonverbal gestures that have well-understood definitions within a given culture
  - Usually have direct verbal translations
    - e.g., the "okay" sign
  - Not universal
    - Each culture has devised its own emblems

Emblem Examples

Social Perception
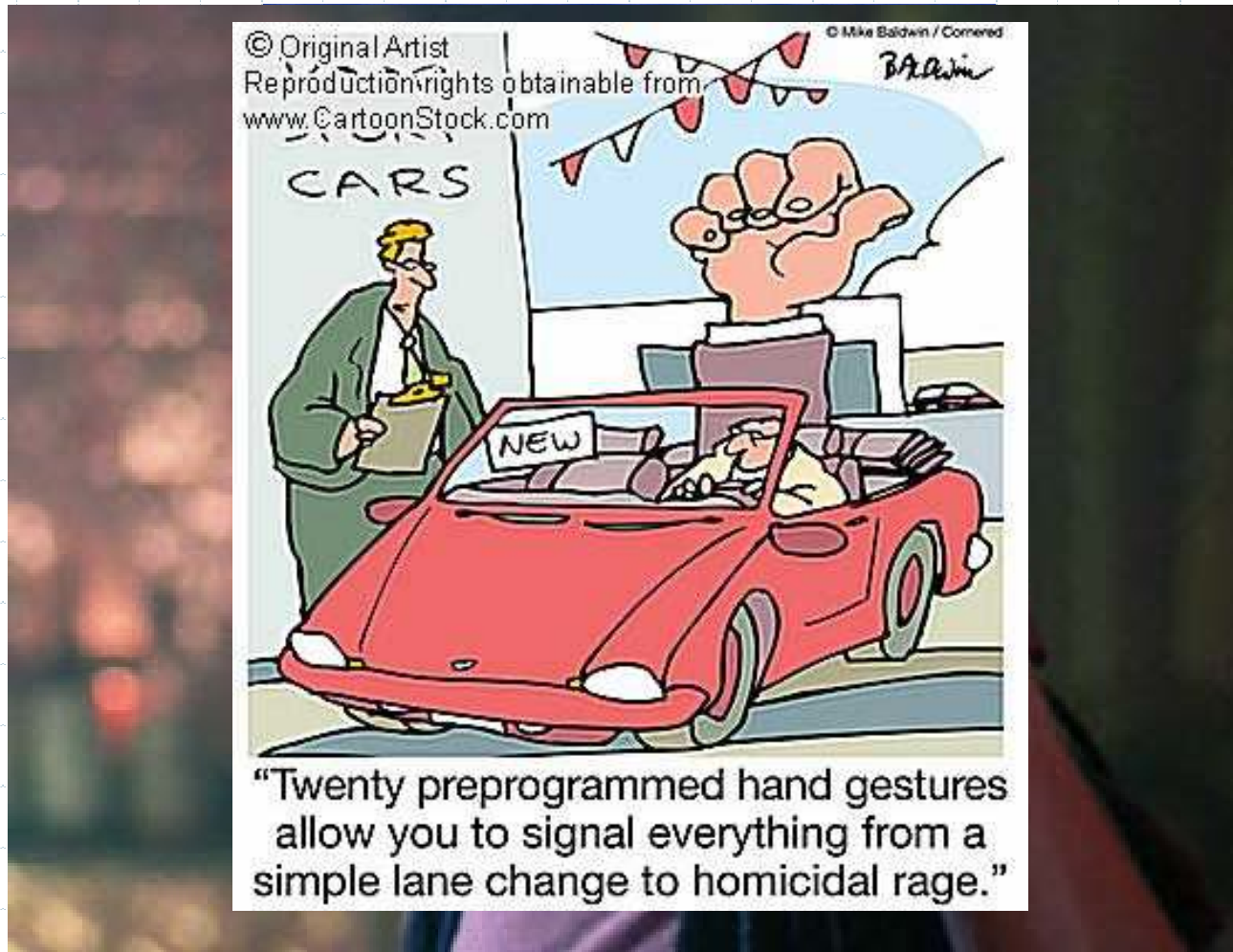
Cultural Emblem Differences

Eye contact and gaze

In North American culture, direct eye contact is valued; a person who won't "look you in the eye" is perceived as being evasive or even untruthful. However, in many parts of the world, direct eye contact is considered disrespectful, especially with superiors. For example, in Nigeria, Puerto Rico, and Thailand, children are taught not to make direct eye contact with their teachers and other adults. Many Aboriginal people in North America use minimal eye contact as well. Japanese use far less direct eye contact than North Americans. In contrast, Arabs use a great deal of eye contact, with a gaze that would be considered piercing by people from some other cultures.

Personal space and touching

Societies vary in whether they are high-contact cultures, in which people stand close to each other and touch frequently, or low-contact cultures, in which people maintain more interpersonal space and touch less often. High-contact cultures include Middle Eastern, South American, and southern European countries.

Low-contact cultures include North American countries, northern European countries, Asian countries, and most North American Aboriginal cultures. Cultures also differ in how appropriate they consider same-sex touching among friends. For example, in Korea and Egypt, men and women hold hands, link arms, or walk hip to hip with their same-sex friends, and these nonverbal behaviours carry no sexual connotation. In North America, such behaviour is much less common, particularly between male friends.

Cultural Emblem Differences

Hand and head gestures

The "OK" sign: In North America, this sign means "OK." In Japan, this hand gesture means "money; in France, it means "zero"; in Mexico, it means "sex"; and in Ethiopia, it means "homosexuality." Finally, in some South American countries, like Brazil, it is an obscene gesture, carrying the same meaning as the American "flipping the bird" sign.

Nodding the head: In North America, nodding one's head up and down means "Yes" and shaking it from side to side means "No." However, in some parts of Africa and India, the opposite is true: nodding up and down means "No," and shaking from side to side means "Yes." In Korea, shaking one's head from side to side means "I don't know" (which in North America is communicated by a shrug of the shoulders). Finally, Bulgarians indicate disagreement by throwing their heads back and then returning them to an upright position—which is frequently mistaken by North Americans as meaning agreement.

The "thumb up" gesture: In North America, this sign means "OK." Several

European countries have a similar meaning for this gesture; for example, in France it means "excellent!" In Japan, the same gesture means "boyfriend," while in Iran and Sardinia, it is an obscene gesture.
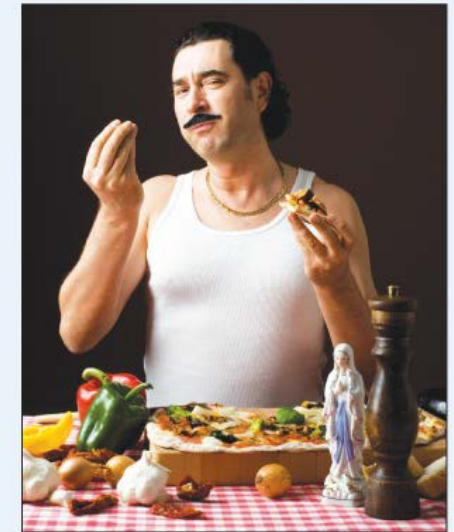
The "hand-purse" gesture: This gesture, which is formed by straightening the fingers and thumb of one hand and bringing them together so the tips touch, pointing upwards, has no clear meaning in North American culture. However, in Italy, it means "What are you trying to say?"; in Spain, it means "good"; in Tunisia, it means "slow down"; and in Malta, it means "you may seem good, but you are really bad."

Implicit Personality Theories

- Types of schema people use to group various kinds of personality traits

- Draw a sketch based on little information:
  - e.g., kind = thoughtful, generous, helpful...
  - e.g., some people believe that those who are shy are not intelligent
  - e.g., attractive people are often assumed to have positive personality traits

- Issue of economy vs. accuracy

Implicit Personality Theories

The Effect of Culture

- Implicit personality theories vary across culture
  - Some personality types are not found in some cultures
    - e.g., "artistic type" of being creative, intense, and temperamental is not known in China
- Tend to be passed on from generation to generation

# The Effect of Culture

- Western culture = artistic IPT

- Chinese culture = shi gu IPT

- IPTs also influenced by language
  - e.g., Chinese bilingual

Causal Attribution: Answering the "Why" Question

- Nonverbal behaviour is relatively easy to decode, but there is still substantial ambiguity about why people act the way they do

- This is the focus of attribution theory
  - Description of the way in which people explain the causes of behaviour
    - Both their own and other people's

The Nature of the Attributional Process

- Heider (1958):
  - Internal (personal characteristics)
  - External (situational factors)

Attributions

others = internal   **self = external**
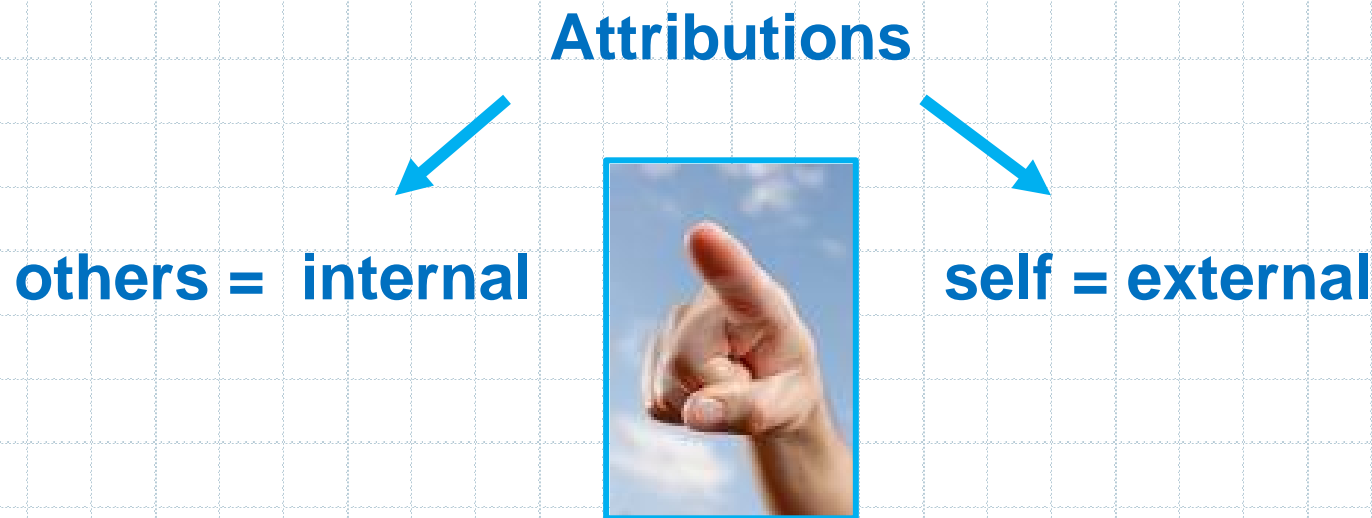
The Nature of the Attributional Process

- Two kinds of causal attributions:
  - Internal attribution:
    - An inference that a person's behaviour is due to something about him or her
      - e.g., attitude, character, or personality
  - External attribution:
    - An inference that a person's behaviour is because of something about the situation he or she is in
    - Assumption is that most people would respond the same way in that situation

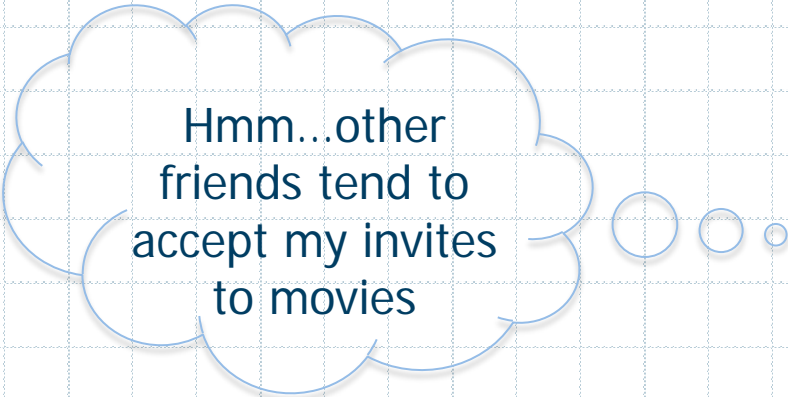# The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- According to Kelley's Covariation Model:
  - In order to form an attribution about what caused a person's behaviour, we systematically note the pattern between the presence (or absence) of possible causal factors and whether or not the behaviour occurs

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- According to Kelley's Covariation Model:
  - Compare a person's behaviour across situations and individuals to see how much it varies from the current behavior
  - When forming an attribution we take into consideration three types of information
    1. Consensus information
    2. Distinctiveness information
    3. Consistency information

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- Consensus information:
  - Information about the extent to which other people behave the same way as the actor does toward the same stimulus

Hmm...other friends tend to accept my invites to movies

The Covariation Model:
Internal vs. External Attributions

- **Distinctiveness information:**
  - Information about the extent to which one particular actor behaves in the same way to different stimuli

Megan never refuses other peoples' invites to movies

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- Consistency information:
  - Information about the extent to which the behaviour between one actor and one stimulus is the same across time and circumstances

This is the first time Megan has refused my invite to the movies

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- Summary:

Consensus	The extent to which others behave in the same manner.
Distinctiveness	The extent to which the behavior is unique to this person/situation.
Consistency	The extent to which the behavior occurs relative to this person or situation.

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- Research Findings:
  - Heavier reliance on consistency and distinctiveness than on consensus
  - Information on all three is not necessary

	INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
CONSENSUS	↓	↑
DISTINCTIVENESS	↓	↑
CONSISTENCY	↑	↑

Attribution Example

- ## Why is the boss yelling?

Consensus high or low?

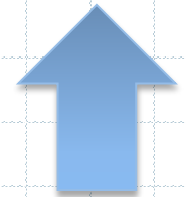Distinctiveness high or low?

Consistency high or low?

Attribution Example
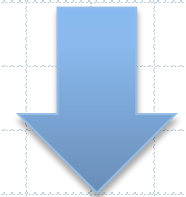
The boss yells at Hannah almost every time she sees her

Also, the boss is the only person who yells at Hannah....and she tends to also yell at all the employees

Consistency

Consensus
Distinctiveness

Internal attribution is made: "It was something about the boss, she is mean"

Attribution Example

All the employees yell at Hannah too

The boss doesn't yell at any of the other employees but she yells at Hannah almost everytime she sees her

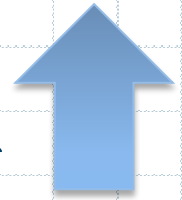**Consensus**

Distinctiveness

Consistency

External attribution is made: "It was something Hannah did…again"

Attribution Example

Hmm...this is the first time the boss yelled at Hannah

Consensus Distinctiveness

or

Consensus Distinctiveness
Consistency

External attribution is made: "It was something about the boss; she must be having a bad day I guess"

The Covariation Model: Internal vs. External Attributions

- Assumes people are rational
- Studies have confirmed that people do make attributions the way the model predicts
- Two exceptions:
  1. People don't use consensus information as much
  2. People don't always have all the relevant information they need to make an attribution

The Correspondence Bias:
People as Personality Psychologists

- Correspondence bias:
  - The tendency to infer that people's behaviour corresponds to or matches their disposition
  - So pervasive that many social psychologists call it the fundamental attribution error (FAE)
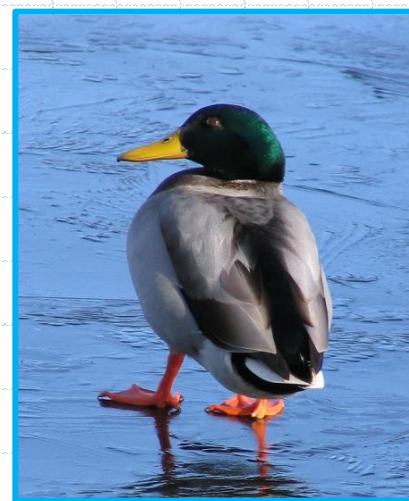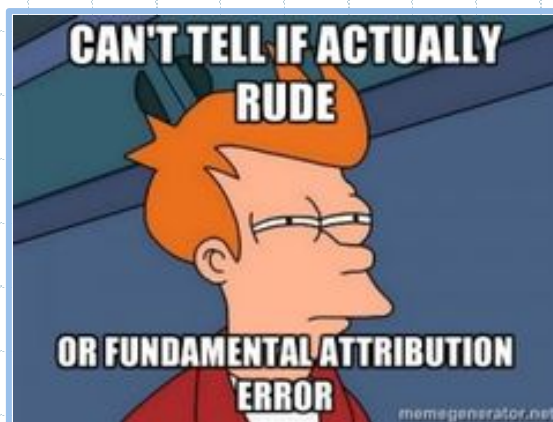
Fundamental Attribution Error

- Recall:
  - FAE is a tendency to overestimate internal, dispositional factors and underestimate the role of situational factors

- Can be explained by perceptual salience
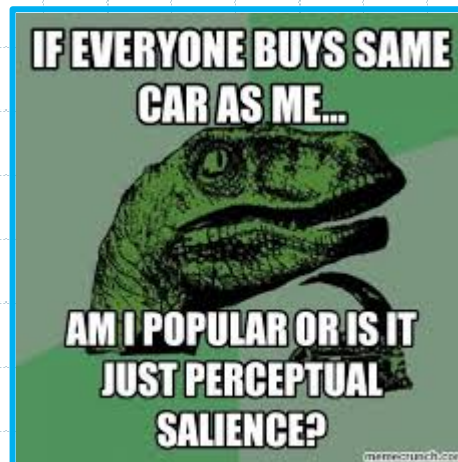
Perceptual Salience

- Information that is the focus of people's attention
  - Point of focus is usually on person and not the situation
- People tend to overestimate the causal role of the information they notice
  - Information about situational causes may be unavailable or difficult to interpret accurately

Perceptual Salience

OBSERVE B

OBSERVE A/B

OBSERVE A

ACTOR A

ACTOR B

OBSERVE B

OBSERVE A/B
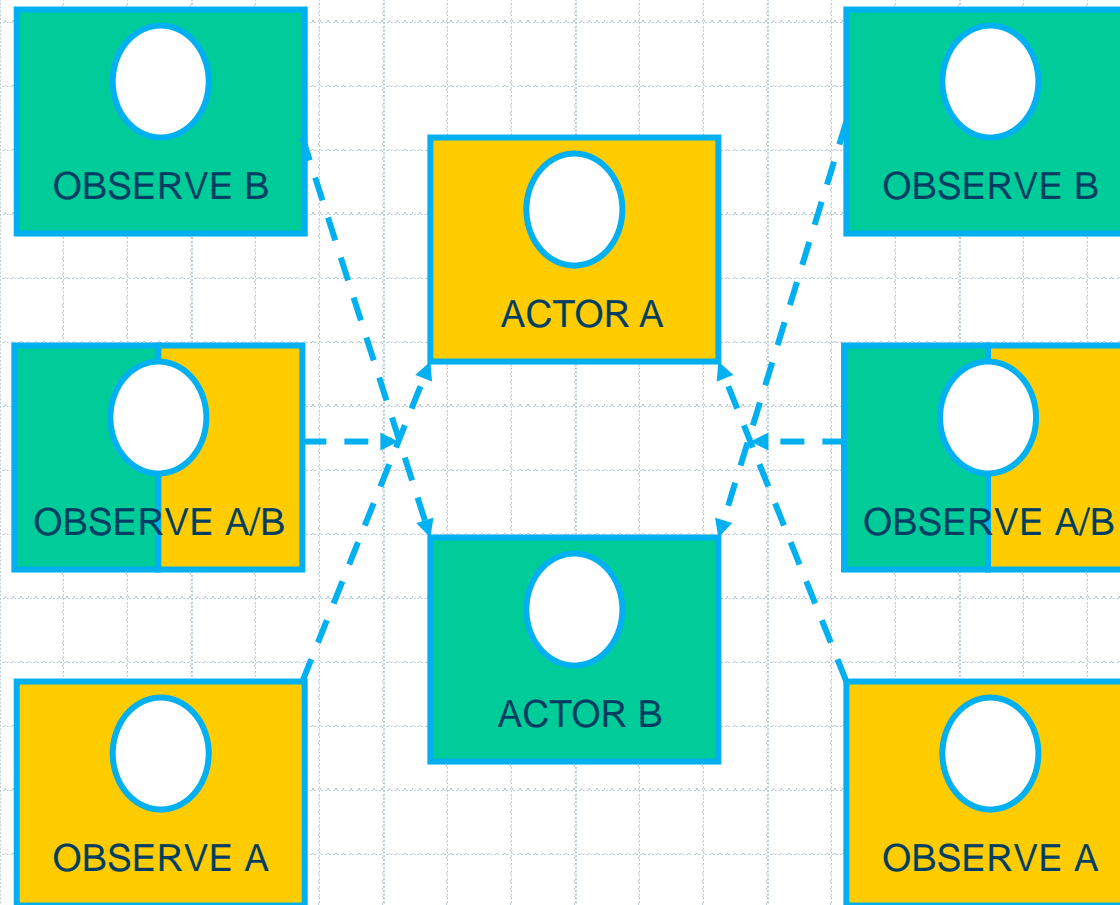
OBSERVE A

The Actor/Observer Difference

- The tendency to see others' behaviour as dispositionally caused, while focusing more on the role of situational factors when explaining one's own behaviour
  - As actors we focus on the situations around us but as observers we focus on the actors
  - Same event = internal attribution for observer, and external attribution for actor

The Actor/Observer Difference

- Cultural Differences:
  - Western:
    - Individual freedom and autonomy
    - Dispositional explanations favoured
  - Collectivist (often Eastern):
    - Group membership, interdependence, and conformity to group norms
    - Situational explanations favoured
  - Differences in fundamental attribution error?

The Correspondence Bias: People as Personality Psychologists

- When we make attributions, we go through a *two-step process*:
  - First, we make an internal attribution, assuming the person's behaviour is caused by something about that person
  - Second, we attempt to adjust this attribution by considering the situation the person was in

The Correspondence Bias: People as Personality Psychologists

- Second step may be skipped due to a lack of time or effort
  - Thus resulting in mainly internal attributions
- Those in collectivist cultures are more likely than those in individualist cultures to take the situation into account
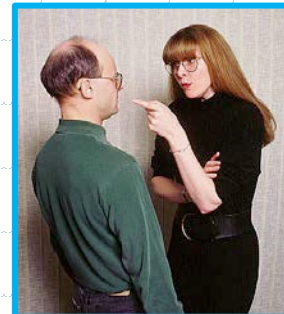
Self-Serving Attributions

- A tendency to take credit for one's own successes (internal attributions)

<p align="center">AND/OR</p>

- A tendency to blame others or the situation for one's own failures (external attributions)

- Made when people's self esteem is threatened

Self-Serving Attributions

- Problems:
  - Own actions = rational and defensible
  - Others' actions = unreasonable and unjustified
  - Overestimate own contributions or involvement when working with others

Defensive Attributions

- A different type of self-serving attribution
  - Explanations for behaviour that help us avoid feelings of vulnerability and mortality
  - Examples:
    - Unrealistic optimism
    - Belief in a just world

Unrealistic Optimism

- Good things are more likely to happen to me than to my peers

- Bad things are less likely to happen to me than to others

- Examples:
  - Diseases (breast cancer, AIDS)
  - Winning the lottery
  - Motorcyclists
  - Relationship outcomes

Belief in a Just World

- The assumption that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get
  - i.e., that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people
- Examples:
  - Car accident: heart attack or cell phone use?
  - AIDS: caused by transfusion or unsafe sex?

Belief in a Just World

- A consequence of Just-World Beliefs is blaming the victim
  - People will blame and derogate innocent victims in order to maintain their just-world beliefs
  - Ex.: rape victims, battered wives, mugging victims, illness caused by controllable factors

Belief in a Just World

- Why are these maintained?
  - To maintain motivation to plan ahead for the future
    - By believing that our long-term efforts and investments will be rewarded
  - To assure ourselves that bad things will not randomly happen to us

on the next...

social
PSYCHOLOGY

Chapter 5:

SELF-UNDERSTANDING