

Social Perceptions and Attitudes

Chapter 13

Perceiving & evaluating other people

- Why do we evaluate others?
 - all of us are naïve psychologists
- Are we accurate?
 - often
 - however, our judgments can suffer from a number of biases
 - when not using all our resources
 - e.g., cognitively loaded
 - when we have limited information
 - when we have hidden motives/goals
 - e.g., our self-esteem is threatened

Attributions from behavior

- Attribution
 - a claim about the cause of someone's behavior
 - seeking a reason for the occurrence of events/behaviors
 - Heider
 - early researcher
 - we intuitively attribute others' actions to personality characteristics

Person vs. Situation Attributions

- Have to decide whether behavior is due to something about personality, or whether anyone would do same thing in that situation
- Kelley's 3 questions in making an attribution
 - does this person regularly behave this way in this situation?
 - do others regularly behave this way in this situation?
 - does this person behave this way in many other situations?
- Example: Susan is angry while driving in a traffic jam

Person bias in attributions

- People give too much weight to personality and not enough to situational variables
- Known as person bias
 - a.k.a. fundamental attribution error
- Conditions promoting person bias
 - when task has goal of assessment of personality
 - when person is cognitively loaded
- Conditions promoting a situation bias
 - when goal is to judge the situation

Two-stage Model of Attributions

- First stage is rapid & automatic
 - bias according to goal (person/situation)
- Second stage is slower & controlled

- won't occur if cognitively loaded
- we correct our automatic attribution

Cross-cultural differences

- Western culture
 - people are in charge of own destinies
 - more attributions to personality
- Some Eastern cultures
 - fate in charge of destiny
 - more attributions to situation

Actor-Observer Discrepancy

- Attribute personality causes of behavior when evaluating someone else's behavior
- Attribute situational when evaluating our own behavior
- Why?
 - hypothesis 1:
 - we know our behavior changes from situation to situation, but we don't know this about others
 - hypothesis 2:
 - when we see others perform an action, we concentrate on actor, not situation -- when we perform an action, we see environment, not person

Prior Information Effects

- Mental representations of people (schemas) can effect our interpretation of them
 - Kelley's study
 - students had a guest speaker
 - before the speaker came, half got a written bio saying speaker was "very warm", half got bio saying speaker was "rather cold"
 - "very warm" group rated guest more positively than "rather cold" group

Effects of Personal Appearance

- The attractiveness bias
 - physically attractive people are rated higher on intelligence, competence, sociability, morality
 - studies
 - teachers rate attractive children as smarter, and higher achieving
 - adults attribute cause of unattractive child's misbehavior to personality, attractive child's to situation
 - judges give longer prison sentences to unattractive people

Effects of Personal Appearance

- The baby-face bias
 - people with rounder heads, large eyes, small jawbones, etc. rated as more naïve, honest, helpless, kind, and warm than mature-faced
 - generalize to animals, women, babies

Stereotypes

- What is a stereotype?
 - schemas about a group of people
 - a belief held by members of one group about members of another group
 - how can we study stereotypes?
 - early studies just asked people
 - today's society is sensitized to harmful effects of stereotyping
 - need different ways of studying

Studying stereotypes

- 3 levels of stereotypes in today's research
 - public
 - what we say to others about a group
 - private
 - what we consciously think about a group, but don't say to others
 - implicit
 - unconscious mental associations guiding our judgments and actions without our conscious awareness

Implicit Stereotypes

- Use of priming: subject doesn't know stereotype is being activated, can't work to suppress it
 - Bargh study
 - have subjects read word lists, some lists include words like "gray," "Bingo," and "Florida"
 - subjects with "old" word lists walked to elevators significantly more slowly
 - another study
 - flash pictures of Black vs. White faces subliminally
 - give incomplete words like "hos____," subjects seeing Black make "hostile," seeing White make "hospital"

Implicit Stereotypes

- Devine's automaticity theory
 - stereotypes about African-Americans are so prevalent in our culture that we all hold them
 - these stereotypes are automatically activated whenever we come into contact with an African-American
 - we have to actively push them back down if we don't wish to act in a prejudiced way.
 - Overcoming prejudice is possible, but takes work