

Module 6 - Attribution  
“The Fundamental Attribution Error”

1. Do This:

Write down the first word or phrase that comes to mind when asked to complete the sentence:

“Most people are \_\_\_\_\_”

2. Let me ask this:

- How many of you would want an interview if you applied for a job?
- How many of you if working with a client would want to use a test to gather information about that client?

3. How would you react?

- Your instructor arrives late for Social Psychology
- A friend receives a poor grade on an exam
- A driver runs a stop sign and dents your fender
- Your significant other cancels plans to go out this evening

4. How do we judge others?

- The availability heuristic
- Ignoring base-rate information
- Illusionary Thinking
- Hindsight
- Confirmation Bias

5. Attribution:

“The logic of social perception” –  
Attributions - How we explain others behavior

6. Fritz Heider

*The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*

Fritz Heider’s Theory

- “**Behavior** can be ascribed primarily to the **person** or to the **environment**. . .

7. Fritz Heider’s Theory

“that is behavior can be accounted for by relatively stable traits of the **personality** or by factors within the **environment**” (1958, p. 56).

## 8. Heider's Social Perception Theory

- People's behaviors constantly change.
- BUT--we perceive the person as continually the same.

## 9. Fundamental Attribution Error

Tendency for observers to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences.

## 10. Lee Ross (1977)

The discounting of the situation as "*the fundamental attribution error.*"

## 11. Attribution Biases - "*the bloopers of social perception*"

- The fundamental attribution error  
We tend to attribute behavior to people's personality when we shouldn't

## 12. Fundamental Attribution Error

Why do we make this error?

The person occupies the center of our attention and seems the cause  
We tend hold others responsible for their actions, provides predictable explanations  
We value individual responsibility  
Language is easier to find for individual behavior than for situations

## 13. Cultural Differences

- *Individualistic* societies see actions as personal choice
- *Collectivistic* societies see actions in context

## 14. Attribution Biases

### **The actor-observer effect**

**Actors** tend to attribute their behavior to circumstances (situational factors)

**Observer's** attribute behavior to the actor's personality (dispositional factors)

Example: 1979 "Who" Concert Stampede

### **Observer's comments:**

"The violently destructive message that The Who and other rock groups deliver leaves me little surprised that they attract a mob that will trample human beings to death to gain better seats. Of greater concern is a respected news magazine's adulation of this sick phenomenon." (Brink 1979)

Example: 1979 "Who" Concert Stampede

### **Actor's comments:**

"While standing in the crowd at Riverfront Coliseum, I distinctly remember feeling that I was being punished for being a rock fan. My sister and I joked about this, unaware of the horror happening around us. Later, those jokes came back to us grimly as we watched the news. How many lives before the punitive and inhuman policy of festival seating at rock concerts is outlawed?" (Brink, 1979)