Social Cognition

Lecture 1

Social Thinking

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Social Cognition

Social Cognition

- How people think about themselves and the social world, or more specifically, how people select, interpret, remember, and use social information to make judgments and decisions.
  - The assumption is that people are generally trying to form accurate impressions of the world and do so much of the time. However, people sometimes form erroneous impressions.

Social Cognition as an Approach

- Social cognition is both a subarea of social psychology and an approach to the discipline as a whole.

- As a subarea, social cognition encompasses new approaches to classic research on **attribution theory** (which means how people explain behavior and events), **impression formation** (how people form impressions of others), **stereotyping** (how people think about members of groups), **attitudes** (how people feel about various things).

- What binds these areas together? It is namely their emphasis on the social implications of peoples' **thoughts** and **subjective perceptions** of reality.

Earlier work necessarily used concepts, methods, and theories created by social psychologists specifically for the domains of interest.

Example

- *Balance theory (Newcomb, 1953) explained some* aspects of attitude change and interpersonal attraction by positing that triads of mental concepts are stable when the product of perceived relations among them is positive, and unstable when that product is negative. This balance principle successfully predicted some phenomena, but applied only within a very limited context and relied on a mathematical algorithm that was not generally employed by other psychological theories.

- video:

Balance Theory.wmv.mp4

- The proliferation of such domain-specific “microtheories” was ultimately troubling to some theorists who suggested that because people have only one mind, a single set of concepts and principles ought to explain its role in all psychological domains. In the 1970s, the leading candidate for this “single set of concepts and principles” was the newly emerged field of cognitive psychology, and more particularly, **the information-processing model.**

Social Cognition as an Approach

By the 1970's, cognitive psychology lead to greater investigation of social thinking and feeling

The core principles of **the information-processing model** were that:

(1) researchers ought to use general concepts and theories rather than idiosyncratic microtheories;

(2) cognitive processes are a major determinant of human judgments and behavior;

(3) the information processing model provides a universally useful structure for examining cognition;

(4) mediating processes should be measured (generally using methods borrowed from cognitive psychology) rather than just assumed;

(5) all of which together imply that there should be one universal set of concepts, principles, and practices underlying most, if not all, psychological theory and research.

Over time, many principles of social cognition became so widely accepted that by 1989, Ostrom concluded that social cognition had become “standard science” (like exact sciences).

- As a result, social psychology as a field has changed. Theorists and researchers across the field routinely use concepts, theories, and methods borrowed from cognitive psychology.

The Information-Processing Model

- The information-processing model includes the following cognitive processes:

(1) attention and perception,
(2) memory, and
(3) judgment.

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"Cognitive Miser"

Human brain consumes a relatively large proportion of human energy (compared to other animals).

Even so, most of this energy is used unconsciously (because this is more efficient).

Conscious energy is limited and needs to be spend wisely.

There is an ample evidence that stipulated: when people's capacity for thinking is already preoccupied, they take even more shortcuts to reduce further need for thought.

Knowledge structures

"Automatic thinking requires little effort because it relies on knowledge structures", e.g.,

- **Schemas**
- **Scripts**
- **Stereotypes**

"We reduce…complex and detailed realities to simple images that can be stored and recalled."

Schemas & Scripts

Schemas describe the temporal organization of objects

Scripts describe the temporal organization of events

Schemas (Bartlett, 1932)

- Stored and automatically accessible information about a concept, its attribution, & its relationships to other concepts.

People try to fill the missing places in the schema automatically. We can observe this not only in everyday life but also in science. As an example, in the theory of evolution where scientists have tried to find the missing elements of human development and even used false data (e.g. bones of other animals) because their scientific schemas has not been lined up. However, when the method of carbon analysis was discovered, it was found that many of these human species lived at the same period of time.....

Sometimes we love our schemes and hypothesis and we pushed them under hypothetical events...

Types Of Schemas

- Role Schemas: Are about proper behaviours in given situations. Expectations about people in particular roles and social categories (e.g., the role of a social psychologist, student, doctor, teacher)
- Self-Schemas: Are about oneself. We also hold idealized or projected selves or possible selves. Expectations about the self that organize and guide the processing of self-relevant information (e.g., if we think we are reliable we will try to always live up to that image. If we think we are sociable we are more likely to seek the company of others).
- Person Schemas: Are about individual people. Expectations based on personality traits. What we associate with a certain type of person (e.g., introvert, warm person, outstanding leader, famous footballer).
- Event Schemas: Are also known as **Scripts**. They are about what happens in specific situations. Expectations about sequences of events in social situations. What we associate with certain situations (e.g., restaurant schemas, Demonstration, First Dating).

Self Fulfilling prophecies

1. We have expectations (schemas) about other people.

2. These expectations can influence the way we act toward these people.

3. These actions can be the cause which leads these people to act in ways that are consistent with our expectations.

Schemas Influence

- Our attention and encoding
- Our memory
- Our judgments
- Our behaviour
  - which can in turn influence our social environment

Schemas: The good

- Effective tool for understanding the world.
- Through use of schemata, most everyday situations do not require effortful thought.

Schemas: The bad

- Influences & hampers uptake of new information (**proactive interference**), such as when situations are inconsistent with *stereotypes*.

Scripts

- Schemas about certain events and roles, e.g., restaurant, work, bank etc.
- Script is like plan of actions in which separate actions can change places on condition of reaching the target.
- Frequency of exposure to a script determines the extent to which the usage of it becomes automatic.

Example: here we have a script. If we make a mistake in it, this can be easily found. What are the mistakes in this example?

1. Hostess greets person

2. Hostess seats person

3. Person pays for food

4. Person orders food from waiter

5. A person enters a restaurant

6. Person looks at menu

7. Person leaves restaurant

8. Person eats food

Answer: The order of the items is 5, 1, 2, 6, 4, 8, 3, 7

One example of a script is a restaurant

Prototype - Definition

Prototype in Social Psychology

A prototype is a cognitive representation that exemplifies the essential features of a category or concept. Specifically, a prototypical representation reflects the central tendency or the average or typical attributes of the members of a category.

OR

A prototype is an abstract mental representation of the central tendency of members of a category.

Prototype

- **An early pioneer of prototype research was psychologist Eleanor Rosch,** whose work during the 1960s and 1970s was inspired by the Aristotelian assumption that categories are logical entities whose membership is defined by an item's possession of simple matching features.
- **A concept in psychology that** is related to the notion of **prototype** is schema. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but there are subtle differences.

- **Prototype** refers to a specific ideal image of a category member, with all known attributes filled in.

- For example, the prototypic "apple" may engender a representation of red, round fruit, even if actual category members vary so much on these characteristic dimensions that the **prototype** becomes meaningless for identifying them, for example some apples are green

- **Eliot Smith (1998)** has argued that the dist**in**ction between schemas and **prototype**s is largely inconsequential and that four general points can be made about schema and **prototype**-based processing.

- First, schemas and **prototype**s are pre existing knowledge structures that are learned from other people or from experience.

- Second, the effects of schemas and **prototype**s on free recall tasks result from two sources: information processing that occurs at the time the stimulus information is first learned, and information processing that occurs when the information is later retrieved or reconstructed.

- Third, schemas and **prototype**s can be primed, thus influencing interpretations of information presented later.

- Finally, separate processes may govern our recall of specific traits and our overall evaluations of a person, rendering prototypes just part of the process of knowing others.

- Example of Prototype

- The **prototype** of table consists of the knowledge that a table has four legs propping up a flat surface. People store prototypical knowledge of **social** groups for example , librarians, policemen or objects, for example, tables, cars. These prototypical representations facilitate people's ability to encode, organize, and retrieve information about everyday stimuli.

Heuristics: Mental shortcuts in social cognition

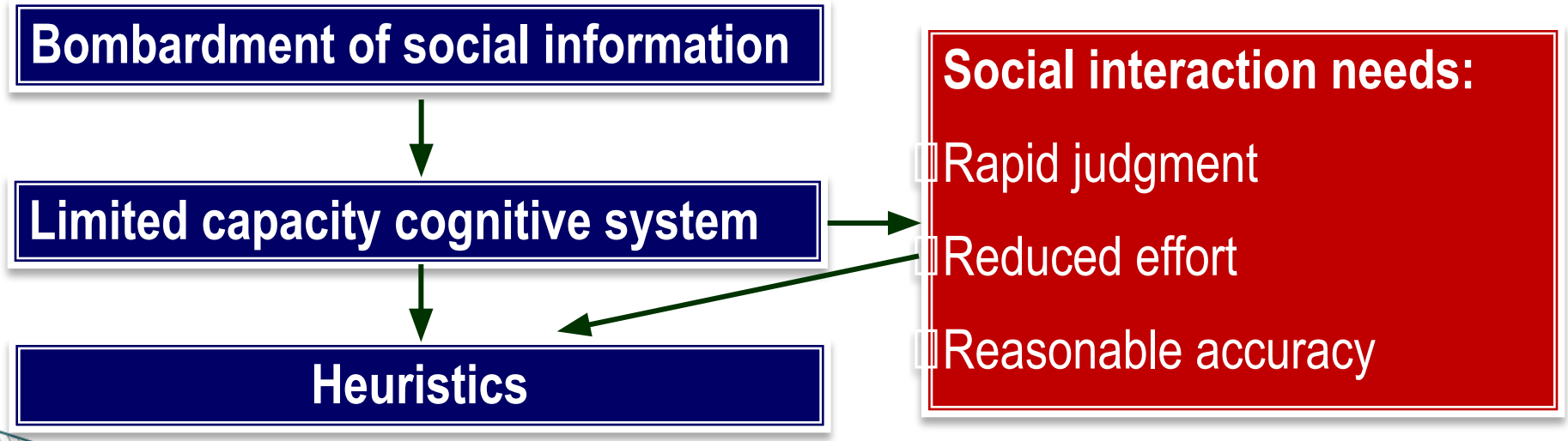
Simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a seemingly effortless manner.

Mental shortcuts/Rules of thumb

Heuristics are rules or principles that allow us to make social judgments more quickly and with reduced efforts.

When do we use these shortcuts:

- Lack of time for full processing
- Information overload
- When issues are not important
- When we have little solid information to use in decision making



Representativeness Heuristic : Judging by resemblance

- A strategy for making judgments based on the extent to which current stimuli or events resemble other stimuli or categories.
- Strategy to make social judgments based on the extent to which current person's or event's characteristics resemble with the characteristics of stored schema of similar event or person.

- Are these judgments accurate?

Availability Heuristic What comes to mind first

- “If I think of it, it must be important”
- Suggests that, the easier it is to bring information to mind, the greater it’s important or relevant to our judgments or decisions.

Priming & Framing

Priming

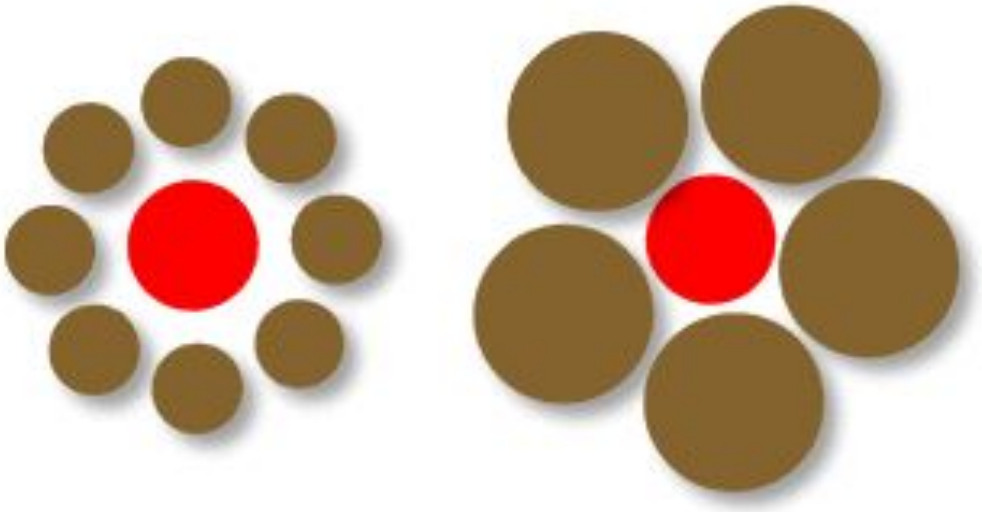
Activating a concept in the mind:

- Influences subsequent thinking
- May trigger automatic processes

e.g., 1st year medical students who begin to think they and other people they know are suffering from serious illness.

Framing

- Context influences interpretation.



Changing the frame can change and even reverse interpretation.

Framing

CNN

Is this a photo of an American soldier rescuing a child, or is it a photo of a child orphaned by American guns? It depends on your frame.

Attributions

"The causes of events always interest us more than the events themselves"

- Cicero

"Happy is he who has been able to perceive the causes of things"

- Virgil

Why do we make attributions?

- Sense of cognitive control.
- To predict the future.
- To respond appropriately.

Attribution Theory deals with how the **social perceiver** uses information to arrive at **causal explanations** for events”

Theories of attribution

- Heider (1958): **‘Naive Scientist’**
- Jones & Davis (1965): **Correspondent Inference Theory**
- Kelley (1967, 1973): **Covariation Theory**

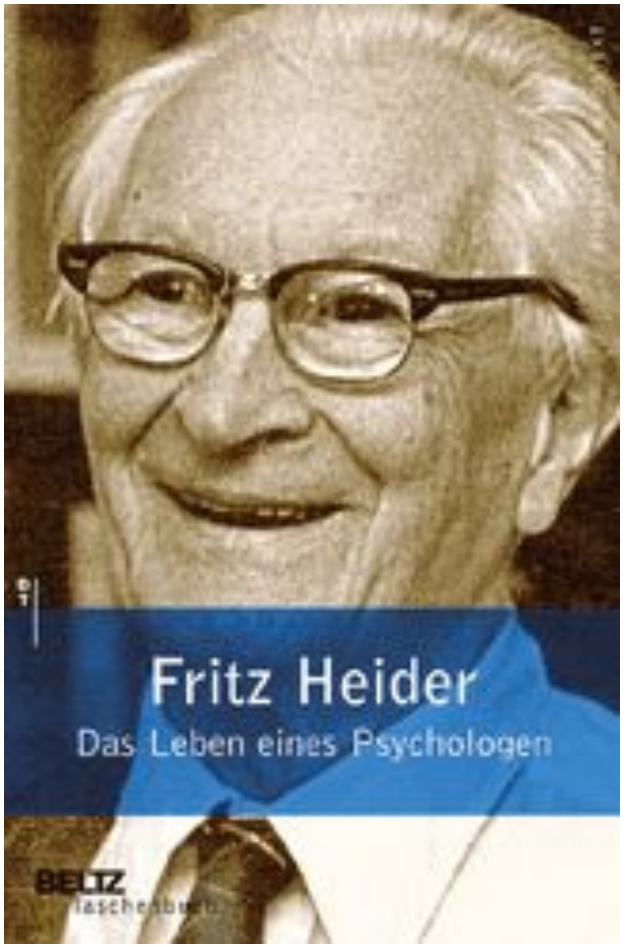
Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, the approach that dominated social psychology in the 1970s, can either be viewed as the last vestige of the old, pre-social-cognition era or as the first harbinger of the new social cognition era. *Attribution theory* is a bit of a misnomer, as the term actually encompasses multiple theories and studies focused on a common issue, namely, how people attribute the causes of events and behaviors. This theory and research derived principally from a single, influential book by Heider (1958) in which he attempted to describe ordinary people's theories about the causes of behavior. His characterization of people as "naive scientists" is a good example of the phenomenological emphasis characteristic of both early social psychology and modern social cognition.

Heider(1958): 'Naive Scientist'

Heider hypothesised that:

People are **naive scientists** who attempt to use rational processes to explain events.



- People perceive behaviour as being ***caused***.
- People give causal attributions (even to inanimate objects!).
- Both disposition & situation can cause behaviour.

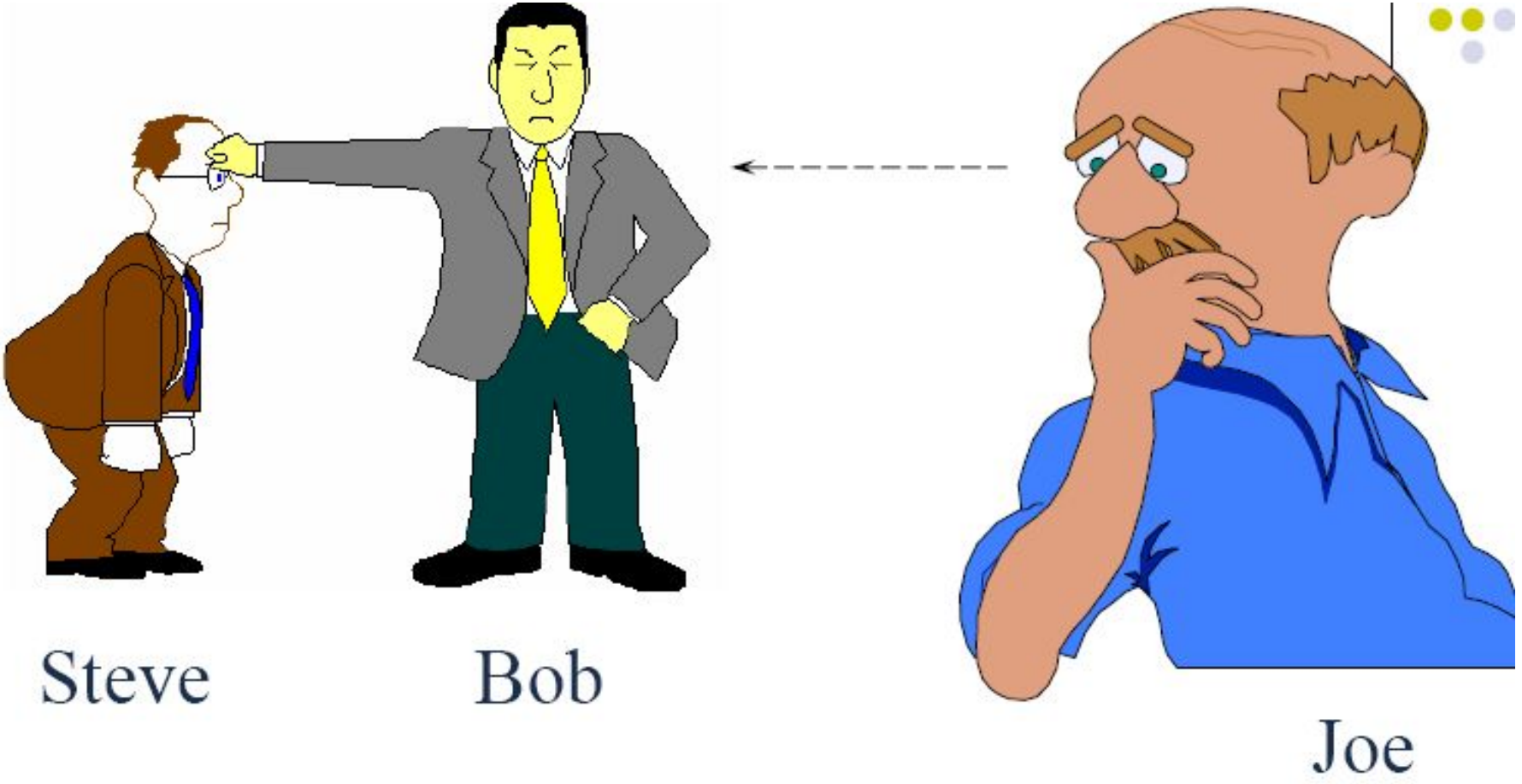
- Causes of behaviour are seen as **inside** (internal) or **outside** (external) of a person.

Internal External

Causes

We generally assume that people choose to behave the way they do,

i.e., **there is a tendency to make *internal* attributions**.



Joe observes Bob hitting Steve. How does Joe explain this behaviour?

Internal attribution

‘Bob is a jerk!’

‘Bob is short-tempered!’

‘Bob likes to beat people up!’

External attribution

‘Steve just told Bob that he is having an affair w/ Bob’s wife.’

‘Steve paid Bob $100 to give him a black eye.’

‘Bob tripped on a cord and accidentally hit Steve when he lost his balance.’

Internal & external attributions

1. You were late for the lecture.
2. Susan failed the test.
3. You got drunk.
4. A driver cuts in front of you.
5. Geoff stole some money.

Jones & Davis (1965): Correspondent Inference Theory

We tend to assume that:

- Observed behaviour and the intentions that produced it correspond to stable underlying qualities within the **actor**.
- Actors behave wilfully.

What is going on?

How do you interpret this person's behaviour?

Jones and Davis' theory derived principally from Heider's discounting principle, which states that confidence in any cause is diminished to the extent that other causes are plausible. One implication is that people will make fewer trait inferences about someone whose socially appropriate behavior can be explained by their personality *and by social norms than about someone whose socially inappropriate* behavior can be explained only by their personality.

This prediction was supported by a classic experiment (Jones, Davis, & Gergen, 1961) showing that inferences about a job applicant's traits were stronger when the candidate behaved in a manner contrary to assumed job-seeking norms.

Correspondent Inference Theory

- A **correspondent inference** (CI) is made when a behavior is believed to correspond to a person's internal beliefs.

Correspondent Inference Theory

We are likely to make a **CI** when we perceive that the behaviour:

- was freely chosen.
- was intended.
- had noncommon consequences.
- was low in social desirability.

Schema: Correspondent Inference Theory