

Social Thinking

MODULE OVERVIEW

Module 43 examines the process by which we decide whether to attribute behavior to the person or to the situation. It focuses on the fundamental attribution error, which is our tendency to attribute other people's behavior to their personalities while attributing our own behavior to the situation. The module concludes with a discussion of the reciprocal relationship between attitudes and actions.

NOTE: Answer guidelines for all Module 43 questions begin on page 364.

MODULE REVIEW

First, skim each section, noting headings and bold-face items. After you have read the section, review each objective by answering the fill-in and essay-type questions that follow it. In some cases, Study Tips explain how best to learn a difficult concept and Applications help you to know how well you understand the material. As you proceed, evaluate your performance by consulting the answers on page 364. Do not continue with the next section until you understand each answer. If you need to, review or reread the section in the textbook before continuing.

Introduction and The Fundamental Attribution Error

Objective 43-1: Identify what social psychologists study, and discuss how we tend to explain others' behavior and our own.

1. Psychologists who study how we think about, influence, and relate to one another are called _____.
2. Fritz Heider's theory of how we explain others' behavior is the _____ theory. According to this theory, we attribute behavior

either to an internal cause, which is called a _____,

or to an external cause, which is called a _____.

3. Most people tend to _____ (overestimate/underestimate) the extent to which people's actions are influenced by social situations because their _____ is focused on the person. This tendency is called the _____.

_____. When explaining our own behavior, or that of someone we know well, this tendency is _____

(stronger/weaker). When observers view the world from others' perspectives, attributions are _____ (the same/reversed).

Give an example of the practical consequences of attributions.

STUDY TIP: To drive home the concept of the fundamental attribution error, think about a recent embarrassing moment. Perhaps you made an unkind remark that you later regretted. In explaining your behavior, you likely would say, "I was caught up in the moment," or "It was the people I was with." These are *external* (situational) attributions. Now think about how you would explain the same type of behavior in another person, especially someone you have just met. If you committed the fundamental attribution error, you would be less likely to "forgive" the person by making an external attribution. Instead, you would attribute it to personality and expect the person to behave similarly in the future.

APPLICATION:

4. Professor Washington's students did very poorly on the last exam. The tendency to make the fundamental attribution error might lead her to conclude that the class did poorly because
- the test was unfair.
 - not enough time was given for students to complete the test.
 - students were distracted by some social function on campus.
 - students were unmotivated.

Attitudes and Actions

Objective 43-2: Explain whether what we think affects what we do, and whether what we do affects what we think.

5. Feelings, often based on our beliefs, that predispose our responses are called _____ . When people focus on an issue and respond favorably to an argument, _____ has occurred. Persuasion may also occur through the _____ (slower/faster) _____ as people respond to incidental cues such as a speaker's appearance.
6. Many research studies demonstrate that our attitudes are strongly influenced by our _____. One example of this is the tendency for people who agree to a small request to comply later with a larger one. This is the _____ phenomenon.
7. When you follow the social prescriptions for how you should act as, say, a college student, you are adopting a _____ .
8. Taking on a set of behaviors, or acting in a certain way, generally _____ (changes/does not change) people's attitudes.
9. According to _____ theory, thoughts and feelings change because people are motivated to justify actions that would otherwise seem hypocritical. This theory was proposed by _____ .
10. Dissonance theory predicts that people induced (without coercion) to behave contrary to their

true attitudes will be motivated to reduce the resulting _____ by changing their _____ .

STUDY TIP/APPLICATION: Cognitive dissonance theory and the foot-in-the-door phenomenon are two powerful examples of our attitudes following our actions. Think about these examples as you complete the following exercises.

11. a. Using the foot-in-the-door technique, how might you persuade a friend to take on an important, time-consuming task such as becoming treasurer of a ski club?
- b. Suppose your roommate thinks climate change is nothing more than a hoax foisted by politicians on a gullible public. Using cognitive dissonance theory, how might you go about changing your roommate's attitude?

APPLICATIONS:

12. Which of the following is an example of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon?
- To persuade a customer to buy a product, a store owner offers a small gift.
 - After agreeing to wear a small "Enforce Recycling" lapel pin, a woman agrees to collect signatures on a petition to make recycling required by law.
 - After offering to sell a car at a ridiculously low price, a car salesperson is forced to tell the customer the car will cost \$1000 more.
 - All of these are examples.
13. Which of the following situations should produce the GREATEST cognitive dissonance?
- A soldier is forced to carry out orders he finds disagreeable.
 - A student who loves animals has to dissect a cat in order to pass biology.
 - As part of an experiment, a subject is directed to deliver electric shocks to another person.
 - A student volunteers to debate an issue, taking the side he personally disagrees with.