

4.1 Attribution Theory and Person Perception

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 11 marks

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **attribution** 归因 and **person perception** 人际知觉.

You must be able to:

- distinguish a **dispositional** 内在 from a **situational** 情境 attribution
- describe the **fundamental attribution error** 基本归因错误
- explain the **self-serving bias** 自利偏差 and the **actor-observer** difference
- describe how **first impressions** and **stereotypes** 刻板印象 shape perception

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Two kinds of attribution

A **dispositional** attribution explains behaviour by the person's character; a **situational** attribution explains it by the circumstances. Most behaviour reflects both.

■ The fundamental attribution error

When explaining **others**, we overweight disposition and underweight situation. The driver who cuts in is "aggressive"; when we do it, we were late for a reason.

■ Self-serving and actor-observer

The **self-serving bias** attributes our successes to disposition and our failures to situation. The **actor-observer** difference is the wider version: we see our own situation and only the other person's behaviour.

■ First impressions and stereotypes

Impressions form fast and then bias later interpretation, so ambiguous behaviour is read to fit the impression. A **stereotype** does the same at group level, supplying expectations before any individual evidence.

2 Practice

2.1 State the difference between a dispositional and a situational attribution. [2]

2.2 Explain the fundamental attribution error with one example. [2]

2.3 A student attributes a good grade to ability and a bad one to an unfair test.

(a) Name the bias. [1]

(b) State one function it serves. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Explaining a stranger's rudeness by their personality rather than their circumstances illustrates [1]

- **A** the self-serving bias
 - **B** the fundamental attribution error
 - **C** a situational attribution
 - **D** stereotype threat
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3.2 We tend to explain our own behaviour situationally because [1]

- **A** we are more honest about ourselves
 - **B** we can see our own situation but only others' behaviour
 - **C** disposition does not apply to us
 - **D** we have no self-knowledge
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3.3 An interviewer forms an impression in the first minute.

(a) State one way this can bias the rest of the interview. [1]

(b) Suggest one procedural safeguard and justify it.

[2]

4 Go further

- work through the **4.1 Attribution Theory and Person Perception** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Social Psychology and Personality** section of the AP Psychology handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 dispositional explains behaviour by the person's character; situational explains it by circumstances.

2.2 overweighting disposition when explaining others' behaviour; e.g. calling a driver aggressive rather than considering they may be rushing to an emergency.

2.3 (a) the self-serving bias. (b) it protects self-esteem.

3.1 B. the situation is discounted in favour of a trait explanation.

3.2 B. our own circumstances are visible to us; others' are not.

3.3 (a) later ambiguous answers are interpreted to fit the impression. (b) use a structured interview with fixed questions and scored criteria, because it forces the same evidence to be gathered and rated for every candidate.