

Social Psychology and Personality

AP Psychology

Explaining Behaviour: Attribution

Social psychology 社会心理学 studies how people think about, influence, and relate to others. It begins with **attribution** 归因 - how we explain behaviour.

An explanation is either **dispositional** 内归因 (about the person's personality) or **situational** 外归因 (about the circumstances). People are not even-handed about which they choose:

- The **fundamental attribution error** 基本归因错误 is over-using dispositional explanations for *other* people's behaviour.
- The **actor-observer bias** 行动者-观察者偏差 is explaining your own behaviour situationally while explaining others' dispositionally.
- The **self-serving bias** 自利偏差 credits success to yourself and blames failure on the situation.
- The **just-world phenomenon** 公正世界现象 is the belief that people get what they deserve.

A person's **explanatory style** 解释风格 can be **optimistic** 乐观的 or **pessimistic** 悲观的, and this shapes how they respond to setbacks.

Person perception has its own effects. The **mere exposure effect** 单纯曝光效应 means repeated contact increases liking. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** 自我实现预言 occurs when expectations cause the behaviour that confirms them. **Social comparison** 社会比较 is judging yourself against others, either **upward** 向上比较 or **downward** 向下比较.

Attitudes and Attitude Change

A **stereotype** 刻板印象 is a generalised idea about a group; it reduces mental effort but can be inaccurate and harmful. **Prejudice** 偏见 is an attitude, and **discrimination** 歧视 is the behaviour. **Implicit attitudes** 内隐态度 are held without full awareness.

Attitudes resist change. **Belief perseverance** 信念固着 keeps a belief alive even after the evidence for it is discredited. **Confirmation bias** 确认偏差 is seeking evidence that fits what you already believe.

Cognitive dissonance 认知失调 is the discomfort felt when actions and attitudes conflict. Because the action has already happened, people often resolve it by changing the *attitude* - which is why doing something can change what a person believes.

Social Situations

Social norms 社会规范 define the behaviour a group expects. Behaviour changes when others are present:

- **Conformity** 从众 is adjusting behaviour to match a group. It rises with group size (up to a point), unanimity, and ambiguity, and falls when even one other person dissents.
- **Obedience** 服从 is following an instruction from an authority. It rises with the authority's perceived legitimacy and closeness, and falls when the victim is close or the authority is distant.
- **Normative social influence** 规范性社会影响 is conforming to be accepted; **informational social influence** 信息性社会影响 is conforming because you think others know better.

Persuasion 说服 has two routes in the **elaboration likelihood model** 精细加工可能性模型: the **central route** 中心路径 uses the strength of the argument, and the **peripheral route** 边缘路径 uses cues such as attractiveness. Sequential techniques matter too: the **foot-in-the-door** 登门槛效应 technique starts with a small request, while the **door-in-the-face** 留面子效应 technique starts with an unreasonable one.

Group settings change behaviour further. **Social facilitation** 社会助长 improves performance on simple or well-practised tasks when others watch, but harms performance on difficult ones. **Social loafing** 社会惰化 is reduced individual effort in a group. **Deindividuation** 去个体化 is loss of self-awareness in a crowd. **Group polarization** 群体极化 pushes a group's average view further in its original direction, and **groupthink** 群体思维 is the suppression of dissent to keep harmony.

Individualism 个人主义 and **collectivism** 集体主义 shape all of these, and **multiculturalism** 多元文化主义 describes societies holding several traditions together. The **false consensus effect** 虚假一致效应 is overestimating how many people agree with you. **Superordinate goals** 超级目标 - shared aims that need cooperation - reduce hostility between groups.

Altruism 利他行为 is selfless helping, though **prosocial behavior** 亲社会行为 may also bring benefit to the helper. The **bystander effect** 旁观者效应 shows people are less likely to help as the number of onlookers rises, because of **diffusion of responsibility** 责任分散.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). The 2025 Evidence-Based Question asked students to "develop and justify an argument about whether the presence of others improves performance", then to "Explain how the evidence from Part B (i) supports your claim using a psychological perspective, theory, concept, or research finding learned in AP Psychology." A full-mark answer supplies a course concept, not just a restatement of the source: "The participants performed better on the simple task when observed (Source 1). This supports my claim because social facilitation predicts that an audience improves performance on tasks that are simple or well practised, while impairing performance on difficult ones." Notice the shape: cite the source, then name the concept **and** state what it predicts. Re-describing the study alone does not earn the explanation point.

Personality: Psychodynamic and Humanistic

	Psychodynamic	Humanistic	Social-cognitive	Trait
What drives personality	unconscious conflict	drive towards growth	person, behaviour and environment interacting	enduring characteristics
Key ideas	defense mechanisms (repression, projection, displacement ...)	unconditional positive regard, self-actualization	reciprocal determinism, self-efficacy, locus of control	the Big Five: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism
How it is assessed	projective tests (weak reliability)	interviews, self-report	observation in context	self-report inventories

all four describe the SAME person from different angles

Four approaches to personality, each with a different driver and a different way of measuring it

Personality 人格 is a person's characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Four approaches are examinable.

The **psychodynamic** 精神动力学 approach holds that **unconscious** 无意识 processes drive personality. **Ego defense mechanisms** 自我防御机制 protect the person from anxiety, and the examinable set is **denial** 否认, **displacement** 转移, **projection** 投射, **rationalization** 合理化, **reaction formation** 反向形成, **regression** 退行, **repression** 压抑, and **sublimation** 升华. It assesses personality with **projective tests** 投射测验, which present an ambiguous stimulus; these have weak **reliability** and **validity**.

The **humanistic** 人本主义 approach focuses on growth. It emphasises **unconditional positive regard** 无条件积极关注 and **self-actualization** 自我实现 - becoming the fullest version of oneself.

Personality: Social-Cognitive and Trait

The **social-cognitive** 社会认知 approach explains personality through **reciprocal determinism** 交互决定论: the person, their behaviour, and the environment each influence the other two. **Self-efficacy** 自我效能感 - belief in one's own ability to succeed at a task - is central, as is **locus of control** 控制点, which is **internal** 内控 or **external** 外控.

Trait theories 特质理论 describe personality as enduring characteristics. The **Big Five** 大五人格 traits are **openness to experience** 开放性, **conscientiousness** 尽责性, **extraversion** 外向性, **agreeableness** 宜人性, and **neuroticism** 神经质. Traits are measured with self-report inventories, which are more reliable than projective tests.

Motivation

Several theories explain what drives behaviour:

- **Drive-reduction theory** 驱力减少理论 says behaviour reduces a physical need to restore **homeostasis** 内稳态.
- **Arousal theory** 唤醒理论 says people seek an optimal level of arousal; the **Yerkes-Dodson law** 耶克斯-多德森定律 states that moderate arousal gives the best performance on most tasks.
- **Self-determination theory** 自我决定理论 separates **intrinsic motivation** 内在动机 (from within) from **extrinsic motivation** 外在动机 (from reward), and **incentive theory** 诱因理论 focuses on the pull of rewards.
- **Instincts** 本能 are innate fixed patterns, seen in non-human animals rather than in human behaviour.
- **Lewin's motivational conflicts** 勒温的动机冲突理论 names three: **approach-approach** 双趋冲突, **approach-avoidance** 趋避冲突, and **avoidance-avoidance** 双避冲突.
- **Sensation-seeking theory** 感觉寻求理论 explains differences in the need for novelty.

Eating shows physical and mental processes interacting. **Ghrelin** and **leptin**, regulated by the hypothalamus, control hunger and fullness, while external factors - the sight of food, the time of day, a shared meal - change how much people eat.

Emotion

Emotion 情绪, also called **affect** 情感, combines physical arousal, expressive behaviour, and conscious experience. Examinable theories are the **James-Lange theory** 詹姆斯-兰格理论 (the body responds first, and emotion is the reading of that response), the **Cannon-Bard theory** 坎农-巴德理论 (arousal and emotion occur at once), and the **Schachter-Singer two-factor theory** 沙赫特-辛格两因素理论 (arousal plus a **cognitive label** 认知标签). **Broaden-and-build theory** 拓展-建构理论 proposes that positive emotions widen thinking and build lasting resources.

Some facial expressions are recognised across cultures, but **display rules** 表达规则 - a culture's norms for showing emotion - and the events that trigger emotion both vary.

Exam tips

- **Fundamental attribution error** applies to explaining *others*. If the question is about explaining yourself, the answer is usually **self-serving bias**.
- **Social facilitation** improves *simple* tasks and harms difficult ones. Say which kind of task the scenario describes.
- Separate **conformity** (matching a group) from **obedience** (following an authority).
- For **cognitive dissonance**, name the conflict and say which side changed - usually the attitude, because the behaviour already happened.
- Learn the **Big Five** as a set; questions often ask you to place a described person on one named trait.
- With emotion theories, the difference is **order**: body first (James-Lange), together (Cannon-Bard), or arousal plus label (two-factor).