

Exercise walk-through

20.1

Social cognition, attribution and social influence: evidence and transfer

GRE · GRE Subject Test · GRE Psychology

Concepts 1

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Attribution assigns causes to behaviour: internal (dispositional) or external (situational). The fundamental attribution error over-uses dispositional explanations for others, and the actor-observer asymmetry reverses this for ourselves. Correspondent inference asks when an act reveals a trait: freely chosen, unexpected or low-consensus acts are the most informative.

Influence comes in two kinds: normative influence is conforming to be accepted; informational influence is accepting others' behaviour as evidence about reality. Asch's line studies showed conformity to a unanimous majority on unambiguous judgements; Milgram's obedience studies showed destructive compliance with an authority. Conformity falls sharply with one dissenting partner.

Concepts 2

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Cognitive dissonance is the tension from holding inconsistent cognitions, reduced by changing attitudes or justifications; with insufficient external justification, people internalise the behaviour. Persuasion follows the elaboration likelihood model: the central route (arguments) produces durable change when audiences can and will think; the peripheral route (cues, attractiveness) is fragile.

Self-evaluation processes include self-affirmation (restoring worth in an unaffected domain after a threat), self-verification (seeking confirming feedback), self-monitoring (adjusting self-presentation) and the self-serving bias (success internal, failure external). Excitation transfer lets residual arousal from one event intensify a later emotional reaction.

Check the transfer argument

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The bus interruption supplies a plausible situational cause. A single event does not establish a stable lazy trait, nor does it prove there are never dispositional contributions. Compare behaviour across occasions, constraints and available alternatives before generalizing. Explain the evidence rather than merely naming attribution bias.

Accept a different explanation when its evidence and limits are justified.

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 A shopper, furious after a parking ticket, screams at a friend who tells him to calm down. Which theory best accounts for the outburst? [1]

- A. excitation transfer B. social identity C. correspondent inference D. distraction-conflict
E. normative focus

2.2 Conforming to a group in order to be accepted, despite private doubt, is: [1]

- A. informational influence B. normative influence C. obedience D. deindividuation E. self-verification

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 A shopper, furious after a parking ticket, screams at a friend who tells him to calm down. Which theory best accounts for the outburst? [1]

A. excitation transfer B. social identity C. correspondent inference D. distraction-conflict
E. normative focus

2.1 Answer: A. Residual arousal from the ticket intensifies the later anger; that is excitation transfer. The other options do not satisfy the stated defining conditions.

2.2 Conforming to a group in order to be accepted, despite private doubt, is: [1]

A. informational influence B. normative influence C. obedience D. deindividuation E. self-verification

2.2 Answer: B. Acceptance-seeking conformity is normative; informational influence takes the group as evidence about reality. Compare the exact process, design or evidence, rather than an associated keyword.

Exercises 2.3·3.1

2.3 Revisit the worked case. State one conclusion its evidence supports and one stronger conclusion it does not support. Explain the difference. [2]

3.1 A late student is called lazy, but the bus stopped unexpectedly. Build a better attribution and name what remains unknown. Give the interpretation, supporting reasoning, a relevant alternative or limitation, and an appropriate check. [4]

Exercises 2.3-3.1

2.3 Revisit the worked case. State one conclusion its evidence supports and one stronger conclusion it does not support. Explain the difference. [2]

2.3 Use the worked case evidence to support a bounded claim and explain why a causal, universal or stronger claim needs additional evidence. The claim must fit the specific design and observed process.

3.1 A late student is called lazy, but the bus stopped unexpectedly. Build a better attribution and name what remains unknown. Give the interpretation, supporting reasoning, a relevant alternative or limitation, and an appropriate check. [4]

3.1 The bus interruption supplies a plausible situational cause. A single event does not establish a stable lazy trait, nor does it prove there are never dispositional contributions. Compare behaviour across occasions, constraints and available alternatives before generalizing. Explain the evidence rather than merely naming attribution bias. Award B1 each (authored) for the interpretation, its reasoning, a relevant limitation/alternative and an appropriate check, up to four points. Accept a different justified answer satisfying these demands.