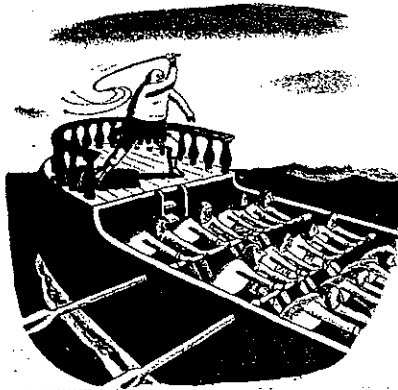


SOCIAL COGNITION AND  
EMOTION ■ CH. 11



"I've heard that outside working hours he's really a rather decent sort." (© The New Yorker Collection 1975 Chas. Addams from Cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.)

occurred while the play was in progress, not much is revealed about the bumper's personality; he was behaving according to the rules of the game. But if the bump occurred some seconds after the official blew his whistle and the play was over, the situation is different. Now the act is more revealing and may be attributed to a grudge or a nasty disposition. The bumper will conclude that the bumper's action was internally caused and will then self-righteously become a bumper when his own turn comes.

## ATTRIBUTION AS A RATIONAL PROCESS

■ Social psychologists refer to this interpretive process as *causal attribution*—the process by which one decides what cause a behavior should be attributed to. The study of how these attributions are formed is one of social psychology's central concerns (e.g., Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967; Jones and Nisbett, 1972; Kelley and Michela, 1980). According to Harold Kelley, one of the first investigators in this area, the process through which such decisions are reached is analogous to the way in which a scientist tracks down the cause of a physical event (Kelley, 1967). An effect (such as an increase in gas pressure) is attributed to a particular condition (such as a rise in temperature) if the effect occurs when the condition is present but does not occur when that condition is absent. Kelley believed that when people try to explain the behavior of others, they implicitly operate according to a similar principle.

To answer the question "Why did he bump me?" the aggrieved player has to consider the circumstances under which bumping is known to occur. Does it generally occur in circumstances just like now? Would most other football players do the same under much the same circumstances? If the answer to these and similar questions is yes, the act will probably be attributed to situational factors: essentially external causes, such as the social pressures of team play. But if the answer is no, the act will be attributed to some dispositional quality: something internal to the actor that is characteristic of him. He is a dirty player who took a cheap shot (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967).

As used in this context, the term *dispositional quality* refers to any underlying attribute that characterizes a given individual and makes her more disposed than others to engage in a particular bit of behavior. One kind of dispositional quality is the presence or absence of some ability. (For example, one might fall because one is clumsy.) A different kind is a general personality trait. (For example, one might leave a very small tip because one is stingy.) Attributions of this sort place causal responsibility for an act on the actor and not on the situation.

## ERRORS IN THE ATTRIBUTION PROCESS

■ Kelley's analysis indicates that the rational way of trying to explain another person's behavior is to consider that behavior in the context of the total situation. Perhaps the behavior is determined by the person, and perhaps it is determined by the setting. Unless one pays attention to both elements, one may fail to understand why the action occurred and what it means. But this is not always done. For there are a number of biases that lead to errors in the attribution process.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

One error concerns the relative weights we give to situational and dispositional factors. While we do consider situational factors in judging the behavior of others, the evidence shows that we do so rather less than we should. Thus, there seems to be a strong bias toward attributing behavior to dispositional qualities, while simultaneously underrating the power of the external situation. This bias is so pervasive that it has been called the *fundamental attribution error* (Ross, 1977). Thus, the person on welfare is often judged to be lazy (a dispositional attribute) when he may really be unable to find work (a situational attribute). Much the same holds for our interpretation of public affairs. We look for heroes and scapegoats, and tend to praise or blame political leaders for acts over which in fact they had little control.

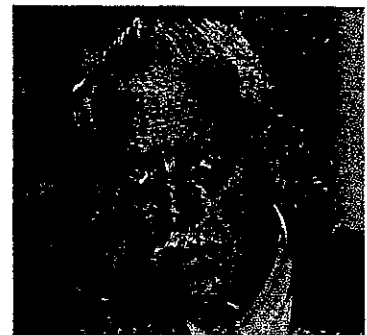
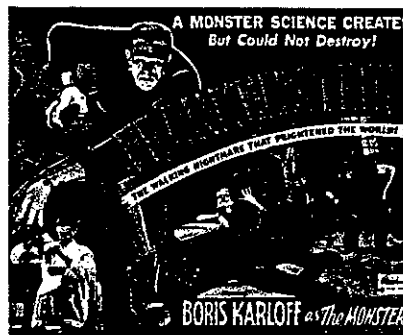
This underemphasis on situational factors is illustrated in an experimental study in which college students were asked to participate in a simulated TV quiz show. Students were run in pairs and drew cards to decide who would be the "quiz master" and who the contestant. The quiz master had to make up questions, drawn from any area in which she had some expertise; the contestant had to try to answer them. Some of the questions were quite difficult (e.g., "What do the initials W. H. in W. H. Auden's name stand for?"). Under the circumstances, it's hardly surprising that the contestants' average score was only 4 correct answers out of 10.

The entire procedure was witnessed by other students who served as observers. When later asked to rate the two participants, the observers judged the quiz masters to be considerably more knowledgeable than the contestants. After all, the quiz masters seemed to have a wealth of factual knowledge, allowing them to generate these challenging questions. The contestants, on the other hand, failed to answer these questions. Obviously, therefore, they didn't know facts that the quiz masters did, and so the contestants must be less knowledgeable.

But, of course, this comparison was rigged, for the quiz masters could choose any question, any topic, that they wished. Hence, if a quiz master had some obscure knowledge on just one topic, he could focus all his questions on that topic, avoiding the fact that he had little knowledge in other domains. The contestants, on the other hand, were at the mercy of whatever questions their quiz masters posed. And, in fact, it would have been an impressive coincidence if the special area of expertise selected by the quiz master was also an area of expertise for the contestant. No wonder, then, that the contestants did so poorly.

This is, in short, a situation plainly set up to favor the quiz master, and so any interpretation of the quiz master's "superiority" needs to take this situational advantage into account. But the observers consistently failed to do this. They knew that the roles in this setting—who was quiz master, who was contestant—had been determined by chance, for they witnessed the entire procedure. But

*Attribution* People sometimes confuse the actor with his role, as in the case of Boris Karloff who often portrayed monsters such as Frankenstein's but who in real life was a gentle and cultured person. (Photographs courtesy of the Kobal Collection)



even so, they couldn't help regarding the quiz masters as more knowledgeable than the contestants—a tribute to the power of the fundamental attribution error (Ross, Amabile, and Steinmetz, 1977).\*

### THE ACTOR-OBSERVER BIAS

The tendency to underrate the importance of situational factors occurs primarily when we try to understand the behavior of others. The results are quite different when we ourselves are the actors rather than the observers. If someone else trips, we think she's careless or clumsy. But when we ourselves trip, we say the floor is slippery. If someone else does poorly on a test, we're astonished by her ignorance. But if the poor grade is our own, we conclude that the test must have been either too hard or unfair.

These contrasts illustrate the *actor-observer difference* in attribution: When we are the observers, our attributions tend to emphasize dispositional factors; this is the pattern that defines the fundamental attribution error. But when we are the actors, the causes seem less in us and more in the external situation (Jones and Nisbett, 1972).

*A cognitive interpretation: Different information* One interpretation of the actor-observer difference is simply that we know ourselves better than we know anyone else. Let's say that on one evening you undertip a waiter in a restaurant. Does this imply that you are a stingy person? You might be certain that you are not, for you have other relevant knowledge about yourself. You might know, for example, that, on other evenings, in other restaurants, you've tipped properly, and perhaps even generously. Thus, you have reason to believe you are not stingy in general; if you've undertipped this evening, this must have been caused by the situation—perhaps the waiter was rude, or you suddenly discovered that you didn't bring enough cash.

Things are obviously different for someone observing you. This observer hasn't seen you in many other situations, and so this one instance of undertipping weighs heavily and can't be discounted. This observer has no basis for concluding that this is an unusual act and may well conclude that it's typical. As a result, the causal attribution will emphasize dispositional factors (your stinginess) rather than the situation.

The suggestion, then, is that the actor-observer difference is a simple consequence of how much we know about ourselves, relative to how much others know about us. Some evidence in line with this hypothesis comes from a study which shows that the tendency to make dispositional attributions is somewhat less when the person we're describing is a close friend rather than a mere acquaintance (Nisbett et al., 1973). As predicted, more knowledge about a person leads to more attention to the situation.

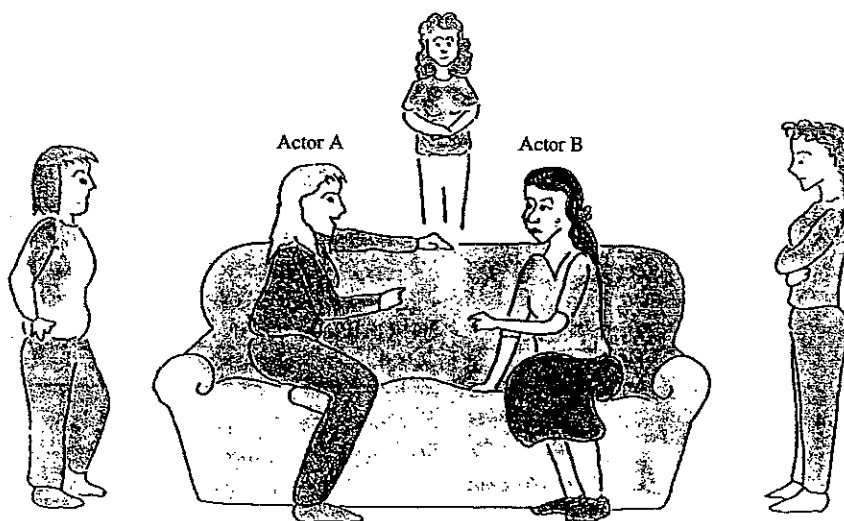
A similar account may explain the *out-group homogeneity effect* we discussed earlier: the tendency to see members of another group as more alike than members of one's own. Almost without exception, we know more about the members of our own group—including our differences from each other—than about members of the out-group. To the extent that we lack such detailed information about them, they seem all the same.

*A perceptual interpretation: Different perspective* There is another factor that contributes to the difference between actors and observers—the two have different

\* The actual details of the experimental procedure were somewhat more complex (among other things, because they involved the use of confederates), but they are irrelevant to the present discussion.

## ATTRIBUTION

**11.2 The actor-observer difference** A schematic figure of a study on the effect of visual perspective on the actor-observer difference. Two actors (actually confederates) were engaged in a conversation and observed from three vantage points: from behind Actor A, from behind Actor B, and from midway between them. The results showed that the observer who watched from behind Actor A believed that B controlled the conversation, while the observer behind Actor B thought the reverse. The observer who watched from midway between the two believed that both were equally influential. (After Taylor and Fiske, 1975)



physical perspectives (see Figure 11.2). To the observer, what stands out perceptually is the actor and her actions. The situation that elicits these actions is seen much less clearly, in part because the stimuli to which the actor responds are not as readily visible from the observer's vantage point. The reverse holds for the actor. She is not focused on her own behavior. One reason is that she cannot see her own actions very clearly (some, such as her own facial expressions, are literally invisible to her). What she attends to is the situation around her—the place, the people, and how she interprets them all. If we assume that whatever serves as the main center of attention (the figure rather than the ground) is more likely to be seen as the cause for whatever happens, then the differences in attribution follow: dispositional for the observer (who thus commits the fundamental attribution error), situational for the actor (Heider, 1958).

Some evidence for this position comes from a study in which two strangers met and engaged in a conversation that was videotaped. When later played back, only one of the two participants was shown (on the pretense that one of the cameras had malfunctioned while the sound was unaffected). As a result, one of the participants saw just what he had seen before: his fellow conversationalist. But the other saw something different: himself. When asked to describe his own behavior, the participant who saw the videotape of his partner gave the usual pattern of attribution—he said that his own actions were caused by the situation. The results were different for the participant who saw himself. The reversed perspective led to a reversal of the usual actor-observer difference. Having watched himself, he described his own behavior in dispositional terms (Storms, 1973).

### THE SELF-SERVING BIAS

The two accounts of the actor-observer bias we've just discussed—different information and perspectives—are essentially cognitive; they argue that the bias results from limitations on what the individual can see, remember, and understand. But there is another interpretation that argues for additional motivational factors. For our thoughts are all too often colored by our desires.

The best evidence comes from work on the *self-serving attributional bias*, which shows that people often deny responsibility for failures and take credit for successes, attributing the first to situational and the second to dispositional factors. The tennis player explains a loss by complaining that her serve was off and that the sun was in her eyes, but she takes a win as proof of her ability and



**Self-serving bias** The self-serving bias can extend to others we see as members of our group, as shown by the different points awarded to a diver at a swim meet by two coaches from opposing teams. Which of the two judges do you think is the diver's own coach? (Courtesy of Reuter's/Bettman Newsphotos)

stamina. The student who fails says that the exam was unfair and happened to cover just those parts of the course that she hadn't studied for, but she believes that a good grade is a tribute to her talent and hard work.

This self-serving pattern has been documented very often (Bradley, 1978). In most studies, participants were asked to perform various tasks and were then given fake information on whether they had achieved some criterion of success. In some, these tasks involved sensory or perceptual discriminations (e.g., Luginbuhl, Crowe, and Kahan, 1975; Stevens and Jones, 1976); in others, they consisted of various tests that were said to measure social sensitivity (Miller, 1976; Sicolyn and Ross, 1977); in yet others, they were competitive games played against fictitious opponents (Snyder, Stephan, and Rosenfield, 1976). The overall pattern of results was always the same: By and large, the participants attributed their successes to internal factors (they were pretty good at such tasks, and they worked hard) and their failures to external factors (the task was too difficult, and they were unlucky).

What holds in the laboratory holds in the real world as well. This is especially true for the world of competitive sports. One study found evidence in the sports pages. The investigators analyzed the postgame comments of college and professional football and baseball players and coaches following important games. Eighty percent of the statements made by the winners were internal attributions: "Our team was great," "Our star player did it all," and so on. In contrast, the losers were less likely to give internal attributions (only 53 percent) and often explained the outcomes by referring to external, situational factors: "I think we hit the ball all right. But I think we're unlucky" (Lau and Russell, 1980, p. 32).

It's worth noting that these self-serving biases apply not just to our own failures or successes but extend to the perception of other people and groups that we regard as in some ways our own: our friends, family members, social and political groups, and even hometown sports teams. Happily married couples are even more prone to a spouse-serving attributional basis than to a self-serving one: The spouse's successes reflect on his or her talents and character; the failures are caused by temporary external circumstances (Hall and Taylor, 1976; Holtzworth-Munroe and Jacobson, 1985). The same holds for people's favorite political candidate. Thus, if a candidate does poorly in a debate, her advocates will argue that she had an off day but that she will be sure to win a rematch, while her opponents will insist that it only proves their own favorite is the superior candidate (Winkler and Taylor, 1979).

**The above-average effect** An interesting example of the self-serving bias is the **above-average effect**. When people are asked to compare themselves to all others on various favorable characteristics, the vast majority judge themselves to be above average—in stark defiance of all statistical logic (see Harter, 1990). Thus, in 1976–77 the College Board asked one million high-school students to rate themselves against their peers on leadership ability: Seventy percent said they were above average, while only two percent felt they were below. Even more impressive, *all* the students claimed they were above average in their ability to get along with others; 60 percent thought they were in the top 10 percent on this dimension. Similarly for athletic ability, which led to an equally illogical 60 percent above and 6 percent below. Similar findings have been obtained in people's judgments of talents ranging from managerial skills to driving ability (see Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg, 1989). And it's not just high-school students who show these effects: One study of university professors found that 94 percent believed they were better at their jobs than their colleagues.

What's going on here? Part of the cause lies in the way we search our

memories, in order to decide whether we have been good leaders or bad, good drivers or poor ones. Evidence suggests that this memory search is often selective, showcasing the occasions in the past in which we've behaved well and neglecting the occasions in which we've done badly. This is probably because each of us starts with the hypothesis that we have in fact behaved well; we then search our memories for prior episodes that would confirm this obviously self-serving hypothesis (Kunda, 1990; Kunda et al., 1993; for more on this sort of confirmation bias, see Chapter 8).

In addition, people seem to capitalize on the fact that the meanings of these traits—effective leader, good at getting along with others—are often ambiguous. This allows each of us to interpret a trait, and thus to interpret the evidence, in a fashion that puts us in the best possible light. Take driving ability. Suppose Henry is a slow, careful driver: He will tend to think that he's better than average precisely because he's slow and careful. But suppose Jane, on the other hand, is a fast driver who prides herself on her ability to whiz through traffic and hang tight on hairpin turns: She will also think that she's better than average because of the way she's defined driving skill. As a result, both Henry and Jane (and indeed most drivers) end up considering themselves above average. By appropriately redefining *success* or *excellence*, we can each conclude that we are the ones who are successful (Dunning et al., 1989; Dunning and Cohen, 1992).

This analysis implies that the above-average effect will occur more strongly with traits (like *driving ability*) that are, in fact, ambiguous. The evidence bears this out: A strong effect is obtained for traits like *sophisticated*, which allow a multitude of interpretations, but the effect is much diminished for reasonably well-defined traits, such as *well read* (Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg, 1989).

*Interpreting the self-serving bias* What accounts for the self-serving bias? The most obvious hypothesis is that it is just another case of impression management. The experimenter asks a participant why he thinks he succeeded or failed. The participant doesn't want to lose face in public and therefore explains his performance to put himself in the best possible light, regardless of what he may actually think. In effect, he is trying to delude the experimenter rather than himself.

While such maneuvers probably play a role, they cannot account for the entire effect. For self-serving biases occur even when participants experience failure but don't think the experimenter knows about it. Under these conditions, their public image is not threatened, so they have no reason to protect it. But they show a self-serving bias even so. Presumably, they are trying to protect the picture they hold of themselves, now deluding themselves instead of—or in addition to—others (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1982; Schlenker, Hallam, and McCown, 1983).



(Photograph by Suzanne Szasz)

PERCEIVING ONESELF

We have discussed some of the ways in which we see various qualities in others, as well as some of the ways in which we come to see such qualities in ourselves. We all have a conception of our own selves, what we are really like and why we do what we do—"I am a certain kind of person with such and such capacities, beliefs, and attitudes"—even if we sometimes sugar-coat those capacities with a layer of self-serving bias. But how do such self-concepts arise in the first place?

## THE SELF-CONCEPT

One crucial element is some reference to other people. It is obvious that there can be no full-fledged "I" without a "you" or a "they," for the self-concept is undoubtedly social. According to many authors, the child begins to see herself through the eyes of the important figures in her world and, thus, acquires the idea that she is a person—albeit at first a very little person—just as they are (Mead, 1934). As the social interactions become more complex, more and more details are added to the self-picture. In effect, the child sees herself through the mirror of the opinions and expectations of those others—mother, father, siblings, friends—who matter to her. Her later behavior cannot help but be shaped by this early "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1902). Examples of such effects include the roles in which society casts children from the moment of birth, roles defined by race, gender, ethnicity, and so on. (For different theoretical approaches to the development of the self-concept, see Chapters 13 and 14; and see Chapter 17 for a sociocultural perspective on personality and conceptions of the self.)

## SELF-PERCEPTION AND ATTRIBUTION

According to this looking-glass theory, we learn who we are by finding out through others—by noting how they treat us, how they react to us, and what they expect from us. But isn't there a more direct method? Can't we discover who we are and what we feel simply by observing ourselves?

According to some authors, the answer is no. In their view, our conceptions of self are attained through an attributional process no different from the one we use to form conceptions of other people. The advocates of this self-perception theory maintain that, contrary to commonsense belief, we do not know our own selves directly (Bem, 1972). In their view, self-knowledge can only be achieved indirectly, through the same attempts to find consistencies, discount irrelevancies, and interpret observations that help us to understand other people.

One line of evidence concerns the relation between attitude and behavior. Common sense argues that attitudes cause behavior, that our own actions stem from our feelings and our beliefs. To some extent, this is undoubtedly true. Those in favor of a strong military are unlikely to join a rally demanding cuts in the defense budget. But under some circumstances, the cause-and-effect relation is reversed. For as already noted in our discussion of cognitive dissonance, sometimes our feelings or beliefs are the result of our actions.

A demonstration comes from the *foot-in-the-door technique*, originally perfected by traveling salesmen. In one study, suburban homeowners were asked to comply with an innocuous request, to put a three-inch square sign advocating auto safety in a window of their homes. Two weeks later, another experimenter came to visit those homeowners who had agreed to display the small sign. This time they were asked to grant a much greater request, to permit the installation of an enormous billboard on their front lawns, proclaiming "Drive Carefully" in huge letters while obstructing most of the house. The results showed that agreement depended upon prior agreement. Once having complied with the first, small request, the homeowners were much more likely to give in to the greater one (Freedman and Fraser, 1966).

One interpretation of this and similar findings is a change in self-perception (Snyder and Cunningham, 1975). Having agreed to put up the small sign, the homeowners now thought of themselves as active citizens involved in a public



*Self-perception and attribution* In the movie *Donnie Brasco*, an undercover FBI agent infiltrates the mob. As his involvement deepens, he grows uncertain of his own allegiances. (Al Pacino and Johnny Depp in the 1997 film; photograph courtesy of Photofest)

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL COGNITION



*The foot-in-the-door effect and the environment* The foot-in-the-door effect can start at an early age. The photo shows young children induced to do their bit for conservation. Whether the cans they collect now make much of a difference matters less than that these acts are likely to lead to greater efforts in the future, as the children come to think of themselves as environmentalists. (Photograph by S. C. Delaney/EPA)

issue. Since no one forced them to put up the sign, they attributed their action to their own convictions. Given that they now thought of themselves as active, convinced, and involved, they were ready to play the part on a larger scale. Fortunately for their less-involved neighbors, the billboard was in fact never installed—after all, the request was only part of an experiment. But in real life we may not be let off so easily. The foot-in-the-door approach is a common device for persuading the initially uncommitted; it can be used to peddle encyclopedias or harden political convictions. Extremist political movements generally do not demand violent actions from newcomers. They begin with small requests like signing a petition or giving a distinctive salute. But these may lead to a changed self-perception that ultimately may ready the person for more drastic acts.\*

This line of argument may have some bearing on our understanding of how social systems function. The social world casts people in different roles that prescribe particular sets of behaviors; representatives of labor and management will obviously take different positions at the bargaining table. But the roles determine attitudes as well as behavior. If one acts like a union representative, one starts to feel like one. The same holds for the corporate executive. This point has been verified in a study of factory workers both before and after they were elected union steward or promoted to foreman. As one might have expected, the newly elected union stewards became more pronoun; the newly promoted foremen became more promanagement (Lieberman, 1956).

## CULTURE AND SOCIAL COGNITION

Many of the social phenomena we have reviewed—the ways we make social comparisons, tend to conform, and attempt to explain the behavior of ourselves and others—have been presumed to reflect very basic properties of our social cognition. But the results of some studies suggest that these phenomena are by no means universal and depend, instead, in important ways on the norms, values, and teachings of one's culture.

Many authors believe that the most relevant distinction between current cultures and ethnic subgroups lies in whether they are *collectivist* or *individualist* (Triandis, 1989, 1994). Collectivist societies include many of the societies of Latin America, and most of the cultures of Asia and Africa. Individualist societies include the dominant cultures of the United States, western Europe, Canada, and Australia. These kinds of societies exhibit profound differences in whether people are considered fundamentally independent or *interdependent* (Fiske et al., 1998).

In collectivist societies, people are considered to be fundamentally interdependent, and the emphasis is on obligations within one's family and immediate community. These primary groups determine what is expected and what is frowned upon, and provide the major motives and rewards; any efforts to individuate or stand out from one's social group are considered disruptions of the group's harmony.

In individualist societies, on the other hand, people are viewed as independent,

\* These phenomena are very reminiscent of the effects of forced compliance and justification of effort we discussed previously in the context of dissonance reduction. Under the circumstances, it may not be surprising that some authors have suggested that such effects are best explained by self-perception theory rather than by a tendency to reduce cognitive dissonance. The resulting controversy between adherents of the dissonance position and of the self-perception approach is beyond the scope of this book (Bem, 1967, 1972).



separable entities whose actions are driven by internal needs, desires, emotions, and so on. In these societies, the emphasis is on the ways a person can stand out through achieving private goals. There are still obligations, of course, to family and to community, but individuals have some leeway in how (or whether) they fulfill these obligations. Thus, one's important life choices—of occupation, friends, and spouse—are much less affected by the wishes of family and neighbors, for the ultimate goal is to be true to oneself, and not to conform.

Thus, students from individualist California are more likely to agree with statements that emphasize self-reliance, such as "Only those who depend on themselves get ahead in life," than are students from collectivist Hong Kong or Costa Rica. In contrast, students from Hong Kong and Costa Rica will be more likely to agree with statements that affirm a concern for one's family and close friends, such as "I would help within my means if a relative told me he (she) is in financial difficulty" and "I like to live close to my friends" (Triandis et al., 1988).

The collectivism-individualism difference offers a fresh perspective on many of the social psychological phenomena we have reviewed, with much of the relevant evidence coming from studies that have used participants from diverse cultures; here, we summarize some of the main results of such *cross-cultural studies*.

## CONFORMITY

■ Asch's studies of conformity and most others like it (see also the Milgram studies of obedience in Chapter 12) were conducted on participants from an individualistic society, the United States. Many of these participants did conform but experienced enormous discomfort as a result, plainly suffering from the contrast between their own perceptions and the perceptions of others. The pattern is different in collectivist cultures. Here, individuals are much less distressed about conforming even when it means being wrong. Over two dozen Asch-type conformity studies have now been conducted in collectivist cultures, and they support such a conclusion (Smith and Bond, 1993).

## ATTRIBUTIONS ABOUT CAUSES OF BEHAVIOR

■ We have noted the many studies which demonstrate that participants tend to explain others' behavior in terms of internal dispositions rather than properties of the situation. But these explanations presume that people are independent and driven internally, a view much more typical in individualist than collectivist societies. We should expect, then, that situational explanations would be more prominent among members of collectivist cultures. Supportive evidence comes from a study in which participants were asked to explain the actions of the main characters in brief stories. Some of the participants were American adults, others Hindu adults from India. The results showed that Americans explained behavior chiefly in terms of personal qualities by a ratio of three to one. Indian participants, on the other hand, were twice as likely to explain the behavior in terms of social roles and other situational factors. For example, one of the stories described a driver and passenger going to work on a motorcycle. The cycle took a spill in which the passenger, but not the driver, was injured. Following the accident, the driver dropped the injured passenger off at the hospital, and proceeded to work. Overall, the Americans typically labeled the driver "obviously irresponsible" or "in a state of shock," whereas the Indians typically explained that it was the driver's duty to be at work or that the passen-

ger's injury must not have looked serious (Miller, 1984; see also Smith and Bond, 1993; Fiske et al., 1998).

Another study examined Chinese and American newspaper accounts of two murders that occurred in the United States. The American accounts were prominently about personal qualities: The murderer was mentally unstable, or had a "very bad temper" or a "psychological problem." In the Chinese accounts, the murders were blamed on the availability of guns, or social isolation, or interpersonal rivalry (Morris and Peng, 1994).

Cross-cultural investigators are quick to point out, however, that using dispositional rather than situational factors to explain behavior (and vice versa) are cultural tendencies, not absolutes. Indeed, even the most collectivist cultures retain the notion of personal traits and dispositions, just as the most individualist cultures retain the notion that situations can explain behavior. The cultural differences may lie instead in the extent to which each member of the culture pays attention to the situations in which behavior occurs. For members of collectivist cultures, people's actions occur in an interlocking social matrix, where the actions of any one may be explained by the actions of all the others (that is, in terms of the situation). But for members of individualist cultures, actions tend to be seen as an outgrowth of an individual's dispositions, so there is little need to look further (Fiske et al., 1998).

## IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS

Collectivists and individualists (that is, members of collectivist and individualist societies) tend to differ in some further ways. Consider group pressure. On the face of it one might expect collectivists to agree or conform with a group's judgments or actions more often than do individualists. But it turns out that this depends on the nature of the group. Collectivists are more likely to agree or conform with members of their in-group, a group to which they are tied by traditional bonds—their family (including second cousins and great-aunts and so on),\* classmates, close friends, and fellow workers. But in contrast, they are less affected than individualists by members of the out-group, with whom they share no such bonds.

A related phenomenon is the permanence of an individual's social bonds. Collectivists belong to relatively few in-groups, but their bonds to those are strong and long lasting. It's no accident that in Japan (a collectivist society) workers tend to remain in whatever organization they started out with, wearing their company's colors and singing company songs, such as "A bright heart overflowing with life links together Matsushita Electric" (Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn, 1984).

In contrast, members of individualist cultures belong to a whole set of overlapping in-groups, but their relation to these groups is more fragile and less enduring. In part, this is a consequence of their different values. To the individualist, what matters most is the freedom to pursue personal goals and preferences. As these change, so do social relationships. As a result, individualists generally make friends more easily than collectivists do, but their friendships tend to be impermanent and to lack intimacy. Freedom is precious, but for some individualists the price is loneliness.

\* Of course, individualists and collectivists both have families to which they have strong ties. But in a collectivist society, the family is normally greatly extended. Typical individualists, on the other hand, take family to mean the *nuclear* family: two parents and their children. Individualists often feel deep affection for their parents, but they don't feel obliged to live with them or close to them after they've started their own-families.

## ABOVE-AVERAGE EFFECT

Recall that, illogically, about 70 percent of American college students consider themselves above average in their leadership ability as well as on a host of other traits. For the above-average effect to occur, most of the students must have been motivated to see themselves as better than their peers, signifying not only a standing apart from one's group but a self-serving standing over it.

Why should deciding that we are somehow superior to our reference group make us feel better? Such a question is rarely asked by members of individualist cultures, who are thoroughly accustomed to the premium those cultures place on self-aggrandizement. But for members of collectivist cultures, self-aggrandizement brings disharmony, and this is too great a price to pay. Evidence for this conclusion comes from a study in which both American and Japanese college students were asked to rank their abilities in areas ranging from math and memory to warmth and athletic ability. The American students showed the usual result: On average, 70 percent rated themselves above average on each trait. But among the Japanese students, only 50 percent rated themselves above average, indicating no self-serving bias, and perhaps pointing instead to a self-harmonizing one (Takata, 1987; Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

We end this discussion of the sociocultural perspective on social cognition with two points. First, it is important to realize that terms that describe a culture don't necessarily apply to all of its members. They designate what is typical or average. There are surely some students from Hong Kong who would marry against their parents' wishes and some from California who would not. But the average student from Hong Kong will be more likely to behave along collectivist lines than the average student from California.

Second, fully considering culture is relatively new to social psychology (see Fiske et al., 1998). Already, findings that were considered fundamental and reliable within social psychology have been shown to be highly dependent on culture. But it is still too early to conclude that our social cognition and its operation are merely the constructions of society. Are there universal aspects of our social cognition that reflect innate predispositions guiding how we think about ourselves and others? Discovering which aspects are part of our human heritage and which we owe to our particular culture is the promise of the sociocultural perspective.

## EMOTION

Our discussion of cultural differences raises many questions, including whether there are some aspects of our inner lives shared by all cultures, uniting us as a species. One plausible candidate is *emotion*.

But what is emotion? This question was raised by the psychologist William James in 1884, and it has haunted psychology ever since. We say that we feel love, joy, satisfaction, grief, jealousy, or anger. But what does it mean to say we *feel* or have *feelings*? Do people the world over feel the same things? And do they act the same ways, and make the same facial expressions, when they have these feelings? These are some of the central questions pursued by those researching emotion.

## EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE: INTERPRETATIONS OF INTERNAL STATES

■ In one of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas, a character notes that the uninitiated may mistake love for indigestion. While this is probably an overstatement, something of the sort may be valid for all of us. We often have to interpret our internal states to decide whether panting and a knot in our stomach mean fear (say, of an impending examination) or breathless anticipation (say, of a lovers' meeting). According to some psychologists, such interpretive processes are involved whenever we experience an emotion (Schachter and Singer, 1962; Mandler, 1975, 1984). To put their views in perspective, we will begin with a discussion of an earlier theory of emotion.

### THE JAMES-LANGE THEORY

Some aspects of emotion, such as our gestures and expressions, are public and can readily be studied. Our physiological responses can also be studied using electronic monitors. But what about the way our emotions are experienced subjectively, the way we feel "inside"?

Many nineteenth-century psychologists tried to catalog various emotional experiences much as they had classified the different sensations provided by the senses (such as *red*, *sour*, *A-flat*). But their efforts were not very successful. People simply reported too many emotional experiences, and the classifications that were proposed did not seem to do justice to the richness of these subjective feelings. In addition, there were disagreements about the precise meaning of emotional terms. How does *sadness* differ from *weariness* or *dejection*? Different people reported different shades of meaning, and there seemed to be little hope of agreement as long as the description was confined to the subjective experience alone (which, of course, is private by definition).

A different approach to the problem was proposed by William James. To James, the crucial facet of emotion was that it is an aspect of what a person *does*. In fear, we run; in grief, we weep. The commonsense interpretation is that the behavior is caused by the emotion. James stood common sense on its head and maintained that the causal relation is reversed; we are afraid because we run:

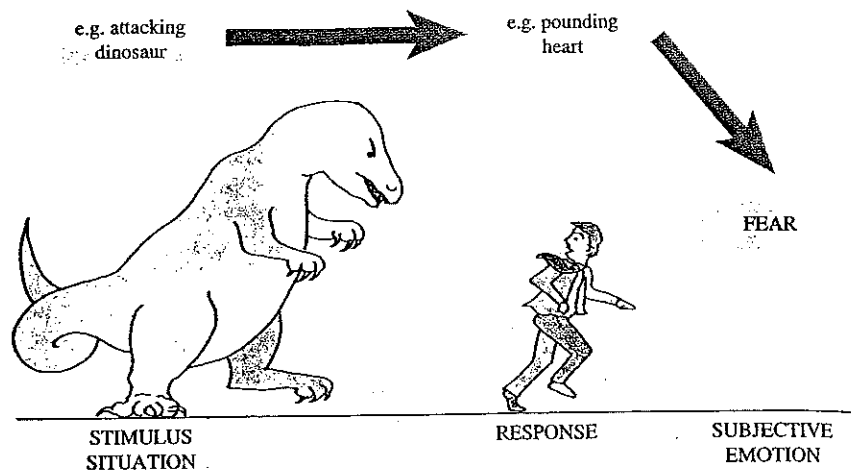
Common-sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here . . . is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble. . . . Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colorless, destitute of emotional warmth. We might then see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we should not actually feel afraid or angry. (James, 1890, v. 2, p. 449)

This is the core of what is now known as the *James-Lange theory of emotions*. (Carl Lange was a European contemporary of James who offered a similar account.) In effect, the theory asserts that the subjective experience of emotion is neither more nor less than the awareness of our own bodily changes in the presence of certain arousing stimuli. These bodily changes might consist of skeletal movements (running) and visceral reactions (pounding heartbeat), although later adherents of the James-Lange theory emphasized the visceral responses and the activity of the autonomic nervous system that underlies them (Figure 11.3).

Some research supports the relationship between the skeletal muscles and



*The misattribution of one's own inner state*  
According to one of the characters in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience*, "There is a transcendentalism of delirium—an acute accentuation of the supremest ecstasy—which the earthy might easily mistake for indigestion." (From a production by the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players; photograph by Lee Snider, 1987)



**11.3** *The sequence of events as conceived by the James-Lange theory of emotions* According to the James-Lange theory, the subjectively experienced emotion is simply our awareness of our own response to the anger- or fear-arousing situation. We see a dangerous object (an attacking dinosaur will do as well as any other); this triggers a bodily response (running, pounding heart), and the awareness of this response is the emotion (here, fear).

emotion, leading several researchers to propose that specific muscular movements *can* account for our emotional experience. This notion would not be at all far-fetched to actors schooled in the “method” of Konstantin Stanislavski, who encouraged his students to get “into role” by adopting the postures, gestures, and facial expressions of the character (Stanislavski, 1936). That posture may influence emotional experience was shown in one investigation in which participants took several achievement tests and then received the results while sitting either in a slump or in an upright posture. All participants were told that their performance was far above average, but those who heard the news while sitting upright reported feeling prouder than those who heard it while slumping (Stepper and Strack, 1993; see also Duclos et al., 1989; we discuss whether facial movements influence emotional experience in a later section).

Still, the James-Lange theory has been the focus of considerable controversy. One major attack on the theory was presented by Walter B. Cannon, the pioneer in the study of the physiology of homeostasis (Chapter 3). Cannon pointed out that the nervous and glandular secretions that comprise our sympathetic reactions are too slow to account for the quickness of our emotional reactions. Moreover, he contended that our sympathetic reactions to arousing stimuli are too diffuse and general to account for the wide range of human emotional experience. Take the relation between rage and fear. These two emotions appear to be accompanied by just about the same autonomic discharge, he claimed, and yet we are easily able to distinguish between these two experiences. Therefore, Cannon concluded, the James-Lange theory must be wrong (Cannon, 1927).

Cannon’s argument also seemed to gain support from early studies in which participants received injections of epinephrine, triggering broad sympathetic activation with all its consequences—nervousness, palpitations, flushing, tremors, and sweaty palms. According to the James-Lange theory, these should be among the internally produced stimuli that give rise to the intense emotions of fear and rage. But in fact the participants did not experience these emotions. Some simply reported the physical symptoms. Others said they felt “as if” they were angry or afraid, a kind of “cold emotion,” not the real thing (Maranon, 1924; Landis and Hunt, 1932). Apparently, the visceral reactions induced by epinephrine are by themselves not sufficient for emotional experience.

More recent evidence suggests, however, that autonomic activity may not be as broad and diffuse as Cannon contended. Some studies of autonomic activity show clear differences in the autonomic patterns that accompany such emotions as anger and fear (e.g., Ax, 1953; Funkenstein, 1956; Schwartz, Weinberger, and Singer, 1981; Ekman, Levenson, and Friesen, 1983; Sinha and Parsons, 1996). And people across cultures report bodily sensations that differ depending on the emotion: People generally report a quickened heart beat and tense muscles when both angry and fearful, and they feel hot or flushed strictly when angry, but when afraid they feel cold and clammy (Mesquita and Frijda, 1992).

However, not all emotions are so easy to distinguish through bodily responses. This, combined with Cannon's other argument regarding the speed of our sympathetic reactions, leaves most contemporary investigators convinced that there is little support for the contention that our behavior alone can account for our emotional experience.

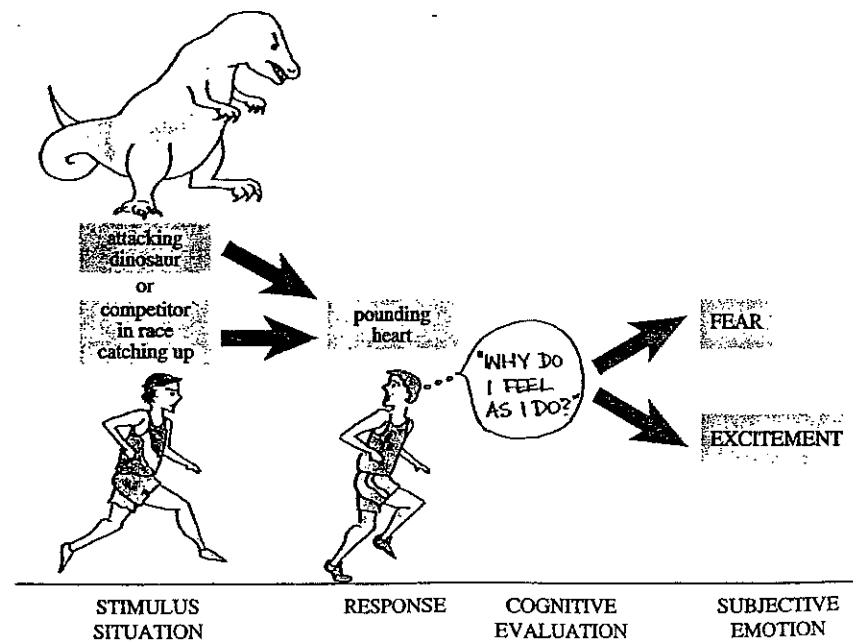
THE ATTRIBUTION-OF-AROUSAL THEORY

In contrast to the James-Lange theory, which emphasizes the role of feedback from the musculature and the autonomic nervous system, an alternative account focuses on cognitive factors. After all, emotional experiences are usually initiated by external events—a letter with tragic news, a loved one's return, a job failure. Events such as these bring grief, joy, dejection, or humiliation, but before they can possibly affect us emotionally they must be appraised and understood. Is the dog friendly or hostile? Is the friend's action generous or indifferent? In each case, our emotional reaction to the situation depends on some cognitive interpretation that in turn depends on what we see, what we know, and what we expect (Arnold, 1970).

Proponents of a theory set forth by Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer combine a cognitive approach with bodily feedback to explain emotion. According to Schachter and Singer's attribution-of-arousal theory (sometimes called cognitive arousal theory) various stimuli may trigger a general state of autonomic arousal, but this arousal will provide only the raw materials for an emotional experience (see Figure 11.4). This state of undifferentiated

Two factors being  
emotion

11.4 The sequence of events as conceived by Schachter and Singer's attribution-of-arousal theory of emotions. According to Schachter and Singer, subjectively experienced emotion is the result of an evaluation process in which the participant interprets his own bodily reactions in the light of the total situation. Any number of external stimuli (ranging from attacking dinosaurs to competition in a race) may lead to the same general bodily reaction pattern—running and increased heart rate. The subjective emotion depends upon what the participant attributes these bodily responses to. If he attributes them to a danger signal (the dinosaur), he will feel fear. If he attributes them to the race, he will feel excitement.



excitement is shaped into a specific emotional experience by cognitive appraisal and interpretation.

A person's heart beats rapidly and her hands tremble—is it fear, rage, joyful anticipation, or a touch of the flu? If the individual has just been insulted, she will interpret her internal reactions as anger and will feel and act accordingly. If she is confronted by William James's bear, she will attribute her visceral excitement to the bear and experience fear. If she is at home in bed, she will probably assume that she is sick. In short, according to the attribution-of-arousal theory, emotional experience is produced, not by autonomic arousal as such, but rather by the interpretation of this arousal in light of the total situation as the person understands it (Schachter and Singer, 1962; Schachter, 1964; Mandler, 1984, 1998).

\* ) ) *The misattribution of arousal* To test this general conception, Schachter and Singer performed a now classic experiment in which participants were autonomically aroused but did not know what caused their arousal. The participants were injected with a drug that they believed to be a vitamin supplement but that was really epinephrine. Some participants were informed of the drug's real effects, while others were misinformed. They were told only that the drug might have some side effects, such as numbness or itching. After the drug had been administered, the participants sat in the waiting room for what they thought was to be a test of vision.

In fact, the main experiment was conducted in this waiting room with a confederate posing as another participant while the experimenter watched through a one-way screen. One condition was set up to produce anger: The confederate was sullen and irritable and eventually stormed out of the room. Another condition provided a context for euphoria: The confederate was ebullient and frivolous; he threw paper planes out of the window, played with a hula hoop, and tried to engage the participant in an improvised basketball game with paper balls. Following their stay in the waiting room, the participants were asked to rate their emotions (Schachter and Singer, 1962).

Schachter and Singer reasoned that those participants who had been correctly informed about the physiological consequences of the injection would show less of an emotional response than those who had been misinformed. The informed participants would (correctly) attribute their tremors and palpitations to the drug rather than to the external situation. In contrast, the misinformed participants had to assume that their internal reactions were caused by something outside—the elation of the euphoric confederate or the sullenness of the angry one. Given this external attribution, their emotional state would be in line with the environmental context—euphoric or angry as the case might be. The results were more or less as predicted. The misinformed participants in the euphoria situation described themselves as more joyful than their correctly informed counterparts and were somewhat more likely than those counterparts to join in the confederate's mad antics. Roughly analogous results were obtained in the anger situation.

*Carry-over of arousal* Some related effects result from a kind of spillover of arousal. Autonomic arousal usually takes a while to subside; as a result, some bodily aftereffects of fear or anger or even physical exercise remain for quite a bit longer than we might expect. Such aftereffects may lead to *excitation transfer* (Zillman, 1983). In one study, some participants first engaged in a bout of strenuous physical activity on an exercise bicycle. A few minutes after they finished pedaling, they were angered by a confederate in an adjacent room who administered a number of mild electric shocks as a way of signaling disagreement on