
UNIT 3 SOCIAL AND PERSON PERCEPTION– DEFINITION, DESCRIPTION AND FUNCTIONAL FACTORS

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Social cognition involves two basic processes of social perception and person perception. The process of social perception helps us in understanding other people and in doing so looks for the causes behind their behaviour. The process starts with using the non-verbal communication channels of body language to understand the person. Next it attempts to understand the cause behind others behaviour by describing the locus of causality or internal or external attribution. The unit further studies the process of impression formation to get a clear understanding of the other's behaviour and touches upon 'implicit personality theory' of preconceived assumptions about people based on our experience.

The unit then describes the second process of social cognition – person perception, which deals with forming impressions of people using clues from their roles in social life, physical cues, their distinct mannerisms forming schemas or mental structures about people, stereotype, scripts. The unit further studies the heuristics a mental short cuts which reduce complex judgement to simple rules of thumb and social categorisation.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After readings through the unit, you will be able to:

- describe social perception and person perception;
- identified different mechanisms behind forming social perception;
- explain the term close to social perception – person perception; and
- analysis the mechanisms of forming person perception.

3.2 SOCIAL COGNITION – DESCRIPTION AND NATURE

Apart from the self, the individual is curious to know about the other people. The phenomenon of how people think about other people is discussed in the social cognition. It is a broad term that describe on the way perceiver encode, process, remember and use information in social contexts in order to make sense of other people’s behaviour. It becomes an essential element in our understanding of inter-group and interpersonal processes.

3.3 SOCIAL PERCEPTION – DEFINITION

“We had one girl in our college, she was very popular among boys but was a subject of jealousy of girls, because boys use to always follow her and she was constantly interacting with them. One day when I asked the other girls ‘what is that this girl has got? The girls unanimously expressed that, she has the knack of talking to boys – the way she looks at them, smiles, her posture, her mannerisms give boys a clue that she is ready for friendship”.

This example brings us to a very important concept in social psychology, *Social Perception*, that is the processes through which we seek to understand other persons. Because other people play such important roles in our life, we engage in this process very often and devote a lot of effort in trying to figure out what makes people tick? Why some people is socially popular and others are not? Sometimes their efforts to impress others work but also we often make errors in our efforts to understand them.

3.4 MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL PERCEPTION

Mechanisms of social perception – people use various techniques, methods, and ways to know about others in order to get superficial or a deeper understanding of them. Mechanisms of social perception include – nonverbal channels of communications, internal and external attributions, impressions and implicit theories about people.

The process of social perception sets the stage for much of social interactions. Our perceptions of the way others feel, their motives and traits play an important role in shaping the nature of our interaction with them. Knowing the other person involves two stages.

Understanding temporary states of others – i.e. their present emotions and feelings.

Understanding the most permanent or lasting characteristics i.e. their motives, intentions or traits.

3.4.1 Understanding Temporary States

Our social behaviour is affected by temporary factors or causes like changing moods, fatigue, illness, and drugs – all these can influence the way in which we think and behave. For example: one of our teacher use to behave in a ‘peculiar way’ and later we realised that it was because she was used to take a strong drug for her illness. Because such temporary factors exert influence on social behaviours and thoughts, we try to find out how others are feeling. How do we go about this process of understanding? If we attempt to ask the people about how they are feeling – we may not get genuine answers and people may look at us in a suspicious manner. So the next best alternative and a less direct method for gathering information about others is to give careful attention their body language and other non-verbal cues, provided by changes in their facial expressions, eye contact, posture, body movement. As noted by Depaulo (1992) such non-verbal behaviour is relatively irresistible or difficult to control, so that even when others try to conceal their inner feelings from us, these non-verbal cues often leak out real feelings in many subtle way especially the people close to the person would understand. The information conveyed by such cues and our efforts to interpret this are often described as ‘non-verbal communication’. The language of facial expressions, eye contact, tone and posture (body language).

3.4.2 Basic Channels of Non-verbal Communication

All of us are aware that we act differently when we are happy or when we are sad. People tend to behave differently when experiencing different emotional states. Let us understand how precisely our inner states show up in our behaviour. This brings us to the basic channels through which such communications take place and there are five basic channels:

- i) facial expressions,
 - ii) eye contact,
 - iii) body language,
 - iv) body movements, and
 - v) touching and proximics.
- i) *Facial expressions:* More than two thousand years ago, the Roman Orator Cicero stated “The face is the image of the soul” by this he meant that human feelings and emotions are often reflected in the face and modern research asserts these findings. But are these facial expressions universal? Early research suggest that facial expressions are universal (Ekman and Friesen 1975) but the result of more recent study, (Russell 1994, Carroll 1996) indicate that although facial expressions are indeed universal, our judgements of these emotions may also be affected by the context and various situational cues.
 - ii) *Eye contact:* As in the case of face, it is also said that “our eyes are windows of soul”. If some one is talking to you and is staring at you constantly, you will feel uncomfortable. Also when some one does not maintain ‘eye contact’, you may feel that the person is hiding something. Similarly, have you ever

had a conversation with someone wearing very dark glasses, if so, you may be in an uncomfortable position and would wonder ‘what the other person is hiding from you’?

Human eyes are indeed a very powerful ‘cue’ in reflecting our feelings and we do often learn much about others feelings from their eyes. While a high level of eye contact with others is usually interpreted as a sign of liking or positive feelings, a stare is often interpreted as a sign of anger or hostility and many people find this non-verbal cues very disturbing.

- iii) *Body language (Gestures, postures and movement)*: Our emotions are always accompanied by physiological arousal and changes. Every emotion has a relatively same set of physiological reactions which have come to us by evolution.

For example: when you are angry, your face becomes red, your fists are drawn together and you are ready to attack.

When you are afraid, your legs start shivering but you are ready to run or faint.

When you are sad, your face becomes pale, and you have a drained down feelings

These postures, gestures and body movements together are termed as body language. Body language often reveals other’s emotional states. Do you have a pet (cat or dog)? if yes, when happy, how does a pet behaves - rubbing, its body, sitting close to you, licking you, clearly indicating its happiness. Straight body position is usually taken to indicate ‘rigidity’, whereas a ‘leaning forward’ body position indicates ‘warmness’ and ‘interest in the other person’. Related finding indicate that large scale body movements or postures can sometimes provide important information about others emotions and even about their apparent traits.

- iv) *Body movement*: More specific information is also provided by gestures. Gestures fall into several categories; the most important are emblems – body movements carrying specific meaning in a given culture. These movements have clear and definite meaning in one culture but in other culture it may not have any meaning. People have to be careful with their gestures while traveling in different cultures as you might offend others without meaning to do so.
- v) *Touching and Proximics*: A lot depends on the meaning you assign to the nature of this physical contact and the context in which it occurs. Existing evidence indicates that when touching is considered appropriate, it often produces positive reactions in the person being touched. One acceptable way in which people in many different cultures touch strangers is through handshake. Many books on etiquette suggest that handshake reveal much about other. Person’s personality traits – assertiveness, humbleness, submissiveness etc.

A practical applicability of these non-verbal cues is recognising deception or lie detection. When people lie, subtle changes often occur in their facial expressions, body posture or movements and certain non-verbal aspects of speech.

Non-verbal cues of deception

- Micro expressions – fleeting facial expressions
- Interchannel discrepancy – inconsistencies between non –
 - verbal cues from different basic
 - channels. Example: eyes telling
 - something facial expressions
 - pleasant
- Non-verbal aspect of speech – Pitch of voice raises
- Speak in a more hesitating manner
- Eye contact – Blinking is more
- Pupils are more dilated
- Low or unusually high eye
- Contact
- Facial expression – exaggerated facial expressions (more smile, broad smile).

Further to check whether lies be detected across cultures? The study by Bond and Atoum (2000) clearly showed that participants were accurate in recognising lies by persons in their own culture than by persons from another culture.

3.5 UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOST PERMANENT OR LASTING CHARACTERISTICS – ATTRIBUTIONS

Humans are rational creatures and always behave in a balanced and coherent and analytic way. This highly influential view was presented by Heider (1958) who said that people are motivated by two primary .

The need to form a coherent view of the world and the need to gain control over the environment. Heider believed that this desire for consistency, stability and the ability to predict and control make us. Naïve scientists. In particular this need to attribute causes to effects. (observed behaviours and event) and to create a meaningful, stable world, where things make sense was the basis for a theoretical approach which become highly influential in how social psychologist viewed social cognition. This was referred as the attribution theory.

Heider believed that a ‘basic need to attribute’ make the world a clear, definable and predictable place, thereby reducing uncertainty.

3.5.1 Types of Attributions

Attributing causality has generated a great deal of work that attempted to model the way in which humans try to explain the actions of themselves and others. This brings us to the ‘Locus of causality’. The main distinction can be made between Internal-External attributions. The internal attribution locates the cause of behaviour to the personal characteristics of the person such as personality, mood, ability, attitudes and effort; it is also known as personal attribution. On

the contrary the external attribution locates the cause to the external events such as actions of others, nature of situation, social pressure or luck. It is also known as situation attribution. A simple example can help us to understand this attribution of causality.

A child fails in an examination if he attributes the cause for his failure to his effort then he is showing internal causality but if he attributes the cause for his failure to his luck, then he is showing external causality.

3.5.2 Theories of Attributions

Attribution is complex process and so many theories have been proposed to explain its operations. Two such views have been extremely influential

1) Theory of correspondence inference, and 2) co-variation model.

The correspondence inference

Jones and Davis's (1965) correspondence inference theory focuses on how we use information about other's behaviour as a basis for inferring that they possess various traits. Other's behaviour provides us with a rich source of information on which to draw.

Very often, it is observed that individuals act in certain ways not because doing so is consistent with their own traits or they want to behave in that way (their choice) but because external factors (external cause) leave them little choice. In such cases, drawing inferences can be misleading.

Two kinds of effects can be observed, when 'many' individuals act in a certain way, this is called common effect, which is usually caused by external events and involves high social desirability. There are situations when an individual behaves in a unique fashion, even though others may not and the act may be socially undesirable. These are the non-common effects. According to Jones and Davis, these non-common effects help one to infer about other's traits.

According to Jones and Davis (1965) we assess whether there is a correspondence between behaviour and personality (i.e. arrive at a correspondent inference or, in other words, a dispositional attribution) by processing three key types of information: social desirability, choice, and non-common effects.

Social desirability information refers to whether the behaviour observed is consistent with or counters to, social norms. An internal, dispositional attribution is more likely when socially to adhere to the majority viewpoint – because they wish to avoid exclusion and ridicule for standing out and being different from the crowd. As such, behaviour that is socially desirable does not tell us much about people's personalities because they may simply be going along with the group norm, which may or may not coincide with their own personal point of view. In contrast, someone who exhibits socially undesirable behaviour – who goes against the social norm – is much more likely to be displaying behaviour that corresponds to an underlying personality trait, because the behaviour cannot be attributed to the person simply conformity to the majority.

According to Jones and Davis, another type of information that social perceivers seek in order to make a correspondent inference is whether the behaviour in question was freely chosen or not. An internal, dispositional attribution is more

likely when the person being observed has freely chosen the given behaviour. Again, this makes a lot of sense; if behaviour has been freely chosen then it is much more likely to be the result of an underlying personality characteristic or attitude, rather than a result of coercion, threat, or inducements.

When a behaviour has a unique consequence, rather than having a range of possible other consequences, we can refer to it as having non-common effects. An internal, dispositional attribution is more likely when the outcome of a behaviour has a unique (or non common) effect. For instance, a punch has really only one possible outcome so it is more likely to be attributed to an internal, dispositional cause.

The co-variation model

Kelley's (1967) co-variation model accounts for multiple behaviours. Importantly, it also details the processes that result in external as well as internal attributions. According to Kelley, causality is attributed using the co-variation principle. This principle states that for something to be the cause of a particular behaviour it must be present when the behaviour is present and absent when the behaviour is absent (i.e. it must co-vary). From multiple potential causes we ascribe causality to the one that co-varies with the behaviour to the greatest extent – acting, as Heider (1958) would say, exactly like native scientists.

The co-variation model states that three types of information are crucial for arriving at an internal or external attribution; (i) consensus (ii) consistency and (iii) distinctiveness information. When observing someone's behaviour in a particular social context, the combined impact of these three types of information will determine what type of attribution is made. Consensus information is the extent to which other people in the scene react in the same way as the target person. Consistency information is the extent to which the target person reacts in the same way on different occasions. Distinctiveness information is the extent to which the target person reacts in the same way in other social contexts.

Here's an example to illustrate. Imagine you are sitting in the class one day and your professor walks in wearing an unusual multi-coloured sweater, sporting on its front a picture of a large happy badger. As native scientists we like to have a stable and predictable world, so you would be compelled to try to figure out why your professor has chosen to wear such a strange garment. According to the co-variation model, you would assess whether the three types of information outlined above are present or absent.

First: consensus. Is everyone wearing the same type of sweater or is it only your professor? If it is only your professor then you're likely to begin to make an internal, dispositional attribution: no-one else is behaving in the same way (i.e. wearing a strange sweater), so the cause of this strange behaviour is likely to be something uniquely to do with your professor, and not the situation (otherwise other people would also be affected by whatever the cause might be – such as a new fashion – and would also be wearing a badger sweater).

Second: consistency. Is this the first time your professor has worn this sweater, or does he do it every week? If he wears this weird sweater every week, then you're going to be even more inclined to make a dispositional attribution. If he is only wearing it this week then you might think he's having only a temporary

fashion crisis – perhaps his washing machine has broken (a situational attribution) and the peculiar sweater is the only one he has left that is clean.

Third: distinctiveness: Does your professor wear this sweater in different classes? Do you see him around campus sporting similarly ill-advised sweaters? If you do, again you're going to be more inclined to make a dispositional attribution (i.e. your professor has chronic fashion problems, or perhaps an enduring badger fixation). This is because the behaviour is not distinctive to the current situation (which would make it likely that it is something in the immediate context that is making your professor wear the sweater).

In sum, if your professor wears bad badger sweaters consistently over time and in different contexts, and he is the only person to be doing so, then you are going to make a dispositional attribution and conclude that he has terrible fashion sense (or a badger fixation). So Dispositional attribution: Any explanation that locates the cause as being internal to the person (personality, mood, attitudes, abilities, effort). Situational attribution: Any explanation that locates the cause as being external to the person (actions of others, the nature of the situation, luck).

3.6 IMPRESSION FORMATION

The moment we look at a stranger, the process of impression formation starts, although we are not aware of such a process, we end up either forming positive or negative impression about others. We look at a person and immediately a certain impression of his character forms itself before us. A glance, a few spoken words are sufficient to start a story about that person. As we have already seen, some aspects of social perception, such as nonverbal communication, attribution which requires a lot of hard work and it is not always easy to draw inferences about other's motives or traits from their behaviour. In contrast, forming first impressions seems to be relatively effortless.

- a) How do we form unified impressions of others in the quick and seeing effortless way that we offer do?

Asch applied these ideas to understand impression formation process suggesting that we do not form impressions simply by adding together all the traits we observe in other persons. Rather we perceive these traits in relation to one another so that the traits cease to exist individually and become a part of an integrated dynamic whole.

On the basis of many studies, Asch concluded that, forming impressions about others involve more than simply adding together individual traits – but the two or more traits entering into a particular relationship. His research exerted a lasting impact on the field.

The impression formation process has been explained by understanding

- i) Role of central traits.
- ii) The issue of adding versus averaging information.
- iii) The primacy or recency of information.
- iv) Central traits – when impressions are being formed of another person some pieces of information carry greater weight than others and are able to modify the whole picture. Asch called such influential

characteristic as central traits and showed that 'warm' or 'cold' dimension was a central one that could strongly affect the organisation of people's impression. Extending Asch's study, Kelley (1950) introduced a guest lecturer to several university classes. Some of the students were told in advance that this lecturer was among other characteristics, a rather 'warm' person and to others that he was 'cold' person. The lecturer gave an identical talk to each group and when each of class member was asked about their impressions, each group formed the impression as per earlier instructions that were consistent with their initial description of 'warm' or cold.

b) Adding Versus Averaging Methods:

Many a times, we are given a list of personality traits that describe a person. For example when describing a person, some one might say that he / she is open minded, clever and modest, but is quiet. What sort of impression do we form of this person? Social psychologists have developed two basic models to explain how this kind of information is combined. The additive model and the averaging model. Both the additive and the averaging models begin by assuming that traits can be sealed in their likeability. Some traits convey very favourable information about a person, while others indicate negative information.

The averaging model claims that we use the mean value of the traits provided to form our impression of a person. For example instance in the earlier example where we said a person is open minded, clever, modest but quiet, if we said only open minded and clever the person would have a more favourable impression, because both these traits are very desirable and have values. But inclusion of the traits modest or quiet would reduce the average as they are less active traits and have low values.

The additive or summation model in contrast, predicts that one's judgement is based on the sum of the traits values rather than on the average. Therefore the majority of evidence is supportive of averaging model. Anderson (1968) has given a weighted average model, over the simple average model discussed earlier: He says that the weighted average model predicts impressions on the basis of an average of scores that have been given weightage according to their importance. This more complicating version of average models gives a better account for our integrating information of other people.

c) Primacy and recency effects:

As said earlier we want to make the best possible impression on others at our first meeting some new relatives. Now the question is which information is more influential the first information in another person's perception of us (primacy effect) or the latest information (recency effect). It was found first impressions are lasting? i.e. primacy effect apparently very important in determining our final impressions of other's. However under certain conditions recency effects also occur, i.e. some additional activity intervenes and influences the more recent information. According to this model, adding values traits 'modest' and 'quiet' to the value of clever and open minded would increase the favorability of the overall evaluation for example: if two persons are given scores on some traits as follows:

Person-I	Person-II
Understand (+3)	Understanding (+3)
Poised (+2)	Sharp willed (+2)
Confident (+1)	Congenial (+2)
	Resourceful (+2)
Total= +6	Loud mouth (-3) Total = +6

Now when we take additive model the sum value for each person would be +6, therefore according to this model the sum value being +6 for both, the overall impression of the two persons would be equally favourable. But when we take the averaging model we get a mean value for each differently i.e. $+6/3=+3$ for person I and $+6/5=1.2$ for person II. Therefore the averaging model would predict that overall evaluation of person I would be better than that of person II will have a stronger effect. For example you met a person at a party last month and formed a negative impression but then encountered her again this week and reached positively, your impression is more likely to be positive than negative. Therefore if one is instructed to combine all information about a person, the recency effect may be eliminated and only the primacy effect would prevail.

Organising Impressions: Categories and Principles

In forming information of other people it is not just the external characteristics or the traits which influence us. Rather we have certain preconceived assumptions about people based on our experiences. At the general level we may have some over siding philosophers of human nature-expectation that people will possess certain qualities and behave in certain ways. At more specific levels we have particular ways of categorising people and events. For example: stereotyping, this is one way of organising our thoughts about certain group of people. To describe these categories of impression social psychologists have started using the words prototype and schemas. We shall now consider some of these categories and principles that effect our interpretation of people and events around us.

3.7 IMPLICIT PERSONALITY THEORY

This is a set of unstated assumption about what traits are associated with one another, which are developed on our own, through development and experience. Since, these theories are rarely stated in formal terms, they are considered implicit. But all the same they dominate our judgment of other people. Such theories may be true or false as judged against the actual occurrence of them in real life. For example we assume that being good at studies would fetch us a good position in the society. This may be true or may be false. In fact the most important feature which distinguishes implicit personality theory from more formal psychological theories is their likely hood of being tested and founded incorrect because we form an association between two aspects and we don't notice the rule. For example having higher education and gaining a good position in the society. Not all highly educated individuals have high position in the society. If we see our politicians, most of them don't even have secondary education. But we make assumption all the same.

The use of such implicit theories shows that we have a need to simplify and integrate information. So that we can deal more easily with the complexities of

human interactions. Even with limited information about a person, we tend to fill in the detail, and make a person more understandable in terms of our own experiences and we invariably develop a rationale for the theory that we have formed.

Another approach to understand people's implicit personality theories is represented in the works of Kelly: he developed the cognitive theory of human behaviour wherein he was concerned with the links between our perception and our behaviour. A most important link in this chain is our interpretation of the events and stimuli in our world.

Self Assessment Questions 1

Exercise-I

- i) Below are given day to day examples, examine each example carefully and choose the appropriate mechanisms of social and person perception:

A mother asks the child little sternly 'did you take money from my purse'. Child answers it as 'no', but he is not looking at her directly. It is an example of which non-verbal communication channel.

In one incident, an Indian man was arrested in Dubai, because this person was found with another woman in her bedroom sitting next to her. This is an example of what nonverbal communication channel.

- ii) In the following example find out the internal and external locus of causality

- a) A child comes homes and informs the mother that he got less marks but he also says that his friend got the highest marks in that paper. What will the mother of the child would say

You have got marks as per your effort or studies

The mother says – my child got less marks because the teacher is partial and she does not like my child.

- b) In a exams, all students copy except one child who does not
This is a effect.

3.8 PERSON PERCEPTION

Person perception is a process of forming impressions of people. Let us understand how do we go about it? What kind of information we use, how accurate it is and what bias affect our impression.

3.8.1 Mechanisms of Person Perception

Mechanisms of person perception – includes ways of impressions about the other person, for this people use whatever obvious physical cues, their behaviour role which are available to them. Also they further develop mental shortcuts by forming schemas and heuristics and further go and categorise them according to some rules of thumb.

A glance at someone's picture or at an individual passing by on the street gives us an idea about what kind of person s/he is. In fact when two people meet, if only for a moment, they start forming impressions of each other. With more

contact they form fuller and richer information of that person. In forming impressions of other person, we depend on the following to help us form impression about a person.

i) Roles/traits

ii) Physical cues and

iii) Saliency

i) *Roles/traits*: If roles are informative, rich and well articulated, it can help in summarising a lot of information across a wide range of situations. Roles are more distinctive than traits. Moreover role schemas are more useful than traits for recall ex: try to recall the names of all the people you met in a seminar and next try to recall rude and stubborn people you met, which task is easier, I am sure it is the first task, because people tend to think of others within a 'role context' first and only then according to their personality traits.

ii) *Physical cues*: The other person's physical appearance and behaviours are usually taken together to form an impression about that person.

The observation that a person is wearing traditional clothes help us infer that the person might be from rural background. We even infer personality traits from person's behaviour – A person who is helping others is inferred as kind, or a chubby faced person is thought to be warm etc.

iii) *Saliency*: People's attention is drawn to those aspects or characteristics of the persons which stand out. This is termed as 'figure ground' principle. A more outstanding feature or salient feature like fair skinned, handicapped, high pitched voice etc., is used to form the overall impression about the person as a total person.

Salient behaviours draw more attention than do less obvious ones. It also influences perception of causality. But a disadvantage here is that saliency also can produce 'extreme evaluative judgement'.

We do not stop at just forming impressions from observable information such as appearance, behaviour, but we move on to quickly form inferences about personality traits about the person from this information. Referring to trait is more economical and general way of describing a person than is referring to behaviour – if someone asked you about what your room mate is like – instead of describing about each and every behaviour of his in detail, it is easier to say that 'he is cool' or 'he is good natured'. This process of inferring also occurs spontaneously, even automatically. These traits can act as bases for predicting future behaviour.

Schemas

Social cognition is the process in which people think about themselves and the social world – how they select interpret, remember and use social information to make judgments and decisions.

How people think about the social world's people rely on a variety of mental shortcuts that serve them well. They use quite practical, adopt different procedures and rules according to their goals and needs in that situation.

Like a scientists, all of us, in our everyday lives, develop theories that help us understand ourselves and the social world. These theories called Schemas are mental structures people use to organise their knowledge around themes or topics or subject.

A schema is a way of representing the memory process. In other words, people do not respond to what they see, rather they interpret it on the basis of previous experience that is represented in memory as a schema.

Self schema is defined as a generalisation about the self based on experience we use to interpret events related to the self. Similarly we have schemata about other people too.

The general form of schema can be defined as an organised configuration of knowledge, derived from past experience that is used to interpret our experience.

We have schemas about many things – other people, ourselves, social roles and specific events. Schemas effect what information we notice, think about and remember.

Schemas are often resistant to change – they show a strong perseverance effect, remaining unchanged even in the face of contradictory information. Perhaps even worse schemas can sometime be self fulfilling.

People have role schema – these represent the organised abstract concepts we have of people in a particular role, such as cowboy, professor, devoted lover.

Other schemas focus on groups. The most familiar is the group stereotype – it is belief about typical characteristics of members of a group or social category, and which attributes specific traits to a particular group of people. Example: certain communities are assumed to be stingy (money wise), absent minded or aggressive etc.

Prototype – is an abstract ideal of the schema – for example may be about his body type, mannerisms etc. we assume leaders to be busy – so a well composed and relaxed leader goes contrary to our schema.

Schemas about extremely common events are usually called scripts. A script is a standard sequence of behaviour over a period of time. The essence of a script is in its boundedness in time, its causal flow and its being simple, coherent, perceptual unit – ex: a wedding in a community goes through a series of rituals connected to each other and follow a pattern many schemas contain. Ex: a category that embodies the significant attribute or ideal of the category – for example in India the name of Sachin Tendulkar is an exemplar of the category ‘cricket’.

Function or schematic processing

Advantages

Schemas and information processing – schemas help us process an enormous amount of information swiftly and economically.

Schemas aid recall – memory often works best when we have a schema representation of past event or people.

Schema speed up processing – it is easier to process information relevant to the schema.

Schemas aid automatic inference – schematic processing can occur almost automatically, without any conscious effort. When meeting a friendly person, you may automatically attribute to him other characteristics associated with friendliness – kindness wart.

Schema aid information – schema can help us fill in missing information where there are gaps in our knowledge.

Schemas aid interpretation – schemas help you interpret ambiguous situation.

A person having no knowledge about ‘mumps’ would have no confusion about other inferences about ‘mumps’ schemas allow confident inferences about matters that would otherwise not be clear.

Schemas provide expectations – schemas contain expectations about what should happen expected match lead to unpleasantness.

Schemas contain affect – use of a particular schema can produce an emotional response called ‘schema-drives-affect’ - for example schema for politician. This schema can have ‘affective response’ attached to it. Some of us feel positively about politician and think of them as helpful law makers, but others may feel negatively thinking of them as power hungry and corrupt.

Heuristics

Although we think all human beings are rational, logical and do cognitive effort to analyse our social worlds, Fiske and Taylor argued that we are quite the opposite i.e. we are cognitive misers. As cognitive misers we are reluctant to expand our cognitive resources and we look for any opportunity to avoid engaging in the effortful thoughts. According to Fiske and Taylor, our mental processing resources are highly valued, so we engage in numerous ways to save time and effort when trying to understand the social world.

People save time and effort in making judgments by using heuristics. Heuristics are time saving mental shortcuts that reduce complex judgment to simple rules of thumb. They are quick and easy but can result in biased information processing (Ajzen,1996) they have been used instead of more time consuming, but more accurate, strategies. The most commonly used types of heuristics are – representatives and availability.

Representatives Heuristics – it is a tendency to allocate a set of attributes to some one if they match the prototype of a given category. It is again quick and easy way of putting people into categories.

The important draw back in such categorisation is the base rate fallacy which is the tendency to ignore statistical information (base rates) in favor of representative ness information.

For example: Even when you have the data that ‘gender is uncorrected with managerial and administrative roles in some organisations, there would be more likelihood of attributing more managerial roles to men than women, because such roles are more representative of men than women.

The availability Heuristic: it is the tendency to judge the frequency or probability of an event in terms of how easy it is to think of examples of that event. It is related to the concept of accessibility, which is the extent to which a concept is readily brought to mind.

For example: you might feel more anxiety about taking a flight if you have just heard about a horrific plane crash.

This heuristic mechanism also gives rise to a bias called the false consensus effect (Gross & Miller, 1997). This is the tendency to exaggerate how common one's own opinions are in the general population.

The anchoring heuristics – It is often the case that a distinction is made between the availability heuristic and another called anchoring heuristics. Anchoring is the tendency to be biased towards the starting value (or anchor) in making quantitative judgement. It appears that our judgements on a range of issues are significantly influenced by the point at which we start our deliberations ex: a harsh verdict become subsequently harsher in their final decision than participants asked.

It is clear that we use heuristics routinely and consistently. In our daily life very often we do not have time to think about every issue as important and self relevant and have all the information not that often. Heuristic thought is used a great deal in social perception.

A unique heuristics that has received considerable attention from social psychologists because it helps in understanding how people, think, feel and behave. It is a heuristic that defines attitudes and social behaviour – social categorisation.

Construct

Construct is a key term for Kelly which is the way of interpreting the world and serves as a guide to behaviour. Human beings have a tendency to choose constructs that will make the world understandable and predictable. Kelly says that people do not strive for reinforcement or try to avoid anxiety. They only try to validate their own construct system. He further suggests that conditions have meanings only if they are constructed by the individual.

Social categorisation

Categorisation is the process of understanding what something is by knowing what other things it is equivalent to and what other things it is different from. It is a way of classifying some collection of objects, events, opinions, attitudes, concepts or people.

Categories are defined by prototype in dealing with social categories we can refer to prototype as stereotype. How are they forming? Mostly based on social learning, experience and existing negative. Stereotypes or shared distinctiveness.

Categories can be heterogeneous (made up of many different sorts of people) or homogeneous (made up of only few people who are similar to each other).

Consequences of categorisation – categorisation typically leads to heightened accessibility of stereotype consistent information. They do not only apply to

relatively neutral categories like librarian or waitress but seen to be also related to racial categories. These positive vs negative stereotypes associated with different groups are therefore highly divisive and can contribute to continuing problems of racial prejudice and discrimination.

Another important fact of Kelly's is that every construct we use helps us to classify the similarities and differences between people, objects and events. Each one of us develop only a limited number of constructs and arrange them in order of importance. One person's construct need not be identical with another person's, though they may be similar. He believes that to the extent that the constructs are similar. People's behaviour will be similar as well. For example: the belief system of a family. The member of the family will behave similar if they have a strong belief system.

Self Assessment Questions 2

Exercise-II

1) There is a mischievous child Anand, who play tricks on other. The teacher get a news that one child was held by the principal for doing serious mischief and the teacher suspects the child to be Anand. This is because of If I assume that people who wear power glasses are very intelligent. What kind of schema is that?

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2) Give the examples of exemplar for the following events

- Boxing
- Athletic
- Beautiful model Ms. India
- Good actor
- Dancer

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3.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have understood the different ways in which we try to understand other people –who are close to us or when we come across in our day to day interactions. We employ two processes to know, understand and interpreted others behaviour – social perception and person perception. This unit specifically deals with structure and functions of these processes.

In social perception, we seek to understand and then try to analyse the ‘cause’ behind others behaviour. Here we concentrate on nonverbal communication and impression formation processes. Then we form theories of attributions and implicit theories in understanding the causes behind the person’s behaviour. Similarly under person perception, we explore the various cues which we gather from other persons behaviour, as well as use cognitive short cuts which we use in the form of schemas heuristics and social categorisations to justify our ‘true’ understanding of others behaviour.

3.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define what social perception is and describe the mechanisms of social perceptions describing in detail any two.
- 2) What is person perception? Describe the different ways of forming person perception.
- 3) “Non-verbal communication channels are the most reliable source of understanding others” – describe its role in social and person perception.

3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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3.12 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1 (Exercise-I)

- i) Eye contact and Proximics in cultural settings
- ii) a is Internal attribution b is External attribution and Non-common trait.

Self Assessment Questions 2 (Exercise-II)

- 1) Salience and Stereotype
- 2) Examples
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