



## CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

Attribution theory concerns how people infer causal relations and the dispositional characteristics of others. Some attributional inferences form rapidly, often in milliseconds, whereas others engage more thought, as the dual-processing distinction suggests. People often draw on basic causal principles first learned in childhood, such as causes preceding effects and temporally or spatially contiguous factors producing effects.

The foundational theories of causal attribution include Heider's analysis of commonsense psychology, Jones and Davis's theory of correspondent inference, Kelley's attribution contributions, Bem's self-perception theory, Schachter's theory of emotion lability, and Weiner's attributional theories of achievement and helping. These theories, notably those by Jones and Davis and by Kelley, focus on the logical principles that characterize controlled attributional processing and detail the idealized ways to make attributions. Such normative theories outline the appropriate guidelines concerning how a process should proceed.

Later work on attribution processes focused primarily on people's mental operations for inferring another's qualities. Attributions of dispositions appear spontaneously and without awareness, perhaps even automatically, when we learn of someone's behavior. Using situational factors to qualify dispositional inferences seems a second, less spontaneous, and more thoughtful process that corrects the initial dispositional inference. Unless situational information is compelling or salient, the social perceiver may never get to the second stage of correction. In addition, given insufficient processing time or capacity to correct dispositional attributions, situational information influences impressions even less.

The attribution process is also marked by persistent biases, most notably: the tendency to make dispositional attribution for a person's behavior; the tendency to make self-serving and self-centered attributions; naive realism, which stems from the perception that one's own interpretations are correct; and defensive attributions of responsibility or blame to others for serious negative outcomes.