**Social Thinking**

Fritz Heiders **Attribution Theory**states that people "attribute" (associate) others behaviors with either their (internal) dispositionor (external) situations. For example, a person who never smiles in class might give the impression to others that either he is an unhappy guy (dispositional attribution) or that the class is making him unhappy (situational attribution).

The following terms and concepts are important to our understanding of social interaction.

**1. Fundamental Attribution Error**When someone attributes others behavior as a reflection of their "real" internal disposition not considering situational effects. That is, one makes the mistake of **underestimating** situational influenceand **overestimating** personality influence*.*E.g. Observing your vice-principal at work may make you think that he/she is forceful, non-tolerating, and cold-hearted (overestimating personality influence) but this is so because their job demands such actions (underestimating situation influence). However, meet up with them at the park with their children, you might see how caring and warm-hearted they are.

**2. Attitudes**Your feelings and beliefs that direct the way you respond to your surroundings. Note in the text how your actions can also dictate your attitudes and how attitudes and actions exist in an enduring cycle.

**3. Foot-in-the-door-phenomenon**The tendency for people who have agreed on a small request to comply later to a larger one. I.e. you are likely to agree to a small questionnaire from a door-to-door salesman at first and then also to agree to larger request say purchasing what he has to offer.

**4. Role**Expectations on how one should behave in a certain social position. I.e. Adults should be responsible, teachers should be fair, policemen should be trustworthyetc.

In **Philip Zimbardos 1972 prison study**, students were randomly assigned to act as prisoners or guards. In less than a week, the students became so absorbed into their "role playing" that the roles they played actually became themselves. The guards adopted abusive attitudes and the prisoners became discouraged and even rebellious. After the study, the students quickly grew back into their normal roles. (See [Zimbardo's Simulated Prison Study](http://www.prisonexp.org/) online- http://www.prisonexp.org/ ).

**The Cognitive Dissonance Theory** states that if what we believe and what we do are inconsistent, we will feel**cognitive dissonance**(discomforting tension) and we will reduce this tension by changing our attitudes. E.g. If we do something that we know isnt quite right such as tell a lie, we may try to convince ourselves that we did so for good reason.