

Social Psychology: Two Big Ideas (Cont'd)



PSYCH 1101: DAY 30

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Social Psychology: Two Big Points

1. thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are powerfully shaped by the social environment.
2. our social perception of other people is fundamentally different than our social perception of *ourselves*.

Self-Serving Biases

Compared to the average person, how good a driver are you?



The Better-Than-Average Effect

- 1 million high school seniors surveyed:
 - 70% thought they were **above average in leadership skills**
 - only 2% thought they were **below average**
- **94%** of college professors believe themselves to do **above average work**
- people demonstrate this effect in nearly every domain and career that has been studied
- the average person even reports that they are better-than-average at **correctly assessing themselves without bias**

Overconfidence

- We are overly generous in our predictions of our own performance
 - e.g., taking home lots of schoolwork over break
 - college students asked to predict when they will complete their senior thesis
 - actually finish it 3 weeks later than their “most realistic” estimate
 - 1 week later than their “worst-case scenario”
- We are overconfident in our estimates of how correct we are in our own judgments, as well as in our own abilities
 - being confident in general is not reliably correlated with being right
 - Dunning-Kruger effect (“unskilled and unaware”): the less you know about a domain, the easier it is to be bad at estimating how good you are
 - e.g., people with low IQ overestimate their IQ more than people with high IQ (who are more likely to underestimate)

We Overestimate Our Contributions

- When asking husbands and wives to estimate the percentage of housework they contribute, the percentages add up to more than 100%
- (this overestimation even occurs slightly for arguments)
- Scientists asked to estimate their contribution demonstrate a similar effect

How Do We Maintain Such Overly Positive Beliefs In The Face Of Reality?

- The “Totalitarian Ego” (Greenwald, 1980): our minds are like a dictator, **controlling information** to benefit itself
 - e.g., Idiosyncratic trait definitions—we selectively use definitions that make us look good
 - How intelligent are you? (intelligence = “street smarts”)
 - How intelligent are your peers? (intelligence = test scores)

Cognitive Dissonance

- Leon Festinger (1957)
 - We are uncomfortable with inconsistencies in our own thoughts and behaviors
 - When we experience this **dissonance** between conflicting thoughts/behaviors, we are motivated to reduce it
- Experimental demonstration
 - Participants paid either \$20 or \$1 to engage in a boring, tedious task (turning pegs)
 - Asked to convince another subject that it's fun
 - Participants paid \$1 actually reported it as being more fun than those paid \$20 ("It must be fun if I did it for only a dollar!")

Dissonance And Selective Attention/Avoidance

- We selectively avoid information that we know might conflict with our own cherished beliefs
 - e.g., Smokers avoid articles about the dangers of smoking
 - What are your political beliefs? What websites do you read?

Motivated Reasoning And Confirmation Bias

- We are more likely to pay attention to and remember information that is consistent with our beliefs.
 - e.g., stereotypes about driving
 - coincidences that point to superstitious beliefs
- Ditto and Lopez (1992): If we are forced to confront inconsistent information then we work hard
 - Ss given an unfavorable medical test result took longer to decide their test result was complete
 - were more likely to retest the validity of their result
 - cited more life irregularities that might have affected test accuracy
 - rated test accuracy as lower than did Ss receiving more favorable diagnoses.

Biases About Others: Attribution

- Why did that person do what they did? What was the cause?
- We seek a reason for the occurrence of events/behaviors
- Roughly two types of attributions:
 - **Personal/internal or dispositional attributions:** refer to things within people, such as abilities, moods, or efforts
 - **Situational/external attributions:** refer to outside events, such as luck, accidents, or the actions of other people

Attributions About The Self

- We tend to have a self-serving bias in making attributions about our own behavior:
 - We attribute our failures to situational, unstable, or uncontrollable factors in a way that casts us in a positive light
 - We attribute our successes to personal, permanent factors in a way that gives us credit for doing well
 - Did poorly on the test? Didn't get enough sleep; the professor created a bad exam
 - Did well on the test? I'm smart.