

Tendencies to Distort Self and Social Reality – Barriers to Critical Thinking

Cognitive Biases and Errors Affecting Self and Social Perceptions, Social Beliefs, and Social Judgments

Self-Perception and Self-Image

1. Self-reference effect -- tendency to process efficiently and remember well information related to oneself.
2. Self-serving bias – tendency to perceive oneself favorably. (Analogous to in-group bias on group level.)
 - a. Self-serving attributions -- credit success to self, failure to external forces.
 - b. Self-congratulatory comparisons -- perceive self as better than average on socially desirable traits.
 - c. Unrealistic (illusory) optimism – tendency to have illusion of invulnerability, overly positive view of future life events; being Pollyannaish.
 - d. False consensus effect – tendency to overestimate the commonality of one’s opinions and one’s undesirable or unsuccessful behavior; “everybody does it.”
 - e. False uniqueness effect – tendency to underestimate the commonality of one’s abilities and one’s desirable or successful behaviors; see one’s virtues as uncommon in others, failings as common in others.
 - f. Cognitive conceit – tendency to overestimate accuracy of one’s beliefs and judgments and misremembering one’s past in self-enhancing ways.
3. Self-presentation – expressing oneself and behaving in ways designed to create a favorable impression to others and to oneself (one’s ideals).
 - a. False modesty – self-serving tendency for some people to disparage themselves in order to illicit reassuring “strokes”
 - b. Self-handicapping – protecting one’s self-esteem with behaviors that create a handy excuse for later failure.
 - c. Self-monitoring – being attuned to the way one presents oneself in social situations and adjusting one’s performance to create the desired impression. High self-monitors are “social chameleons,” adjusting behavior to situation.

Social Beliefs, Memory, and Judgements

4. Fundamental attribution error (correspondence bias) – tendency for observers to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences upon others’ behavior, i.e., others are the way they act.
 - a. Actor-observer difference (effect) – tendency to look for causes of behavior where we focus attention: as actors we focus on the environment and perceive the cause of our behavior in the situation; as observers of others’ behavior, we focus on the person (not the environment) and perceive the cause to be in the person’s dispositions. (We find causes of behavior where we look for them.)
5. Belief perseverance – persistence of one’s initial conceptions, as when the basis for one’s belief is discredited but an explanation of why the belief might be true survives. (Beliefs survive discrediting evidence and take on a life of their own.)

6. Rosy retrospection – tendency to recall mildly pleasant events more favorably than they actually were experienced.
7. Misinformation effect – incorporating “misinformation” into one’s memory of the event, after witnessing an event and receiving misleading information about it.
8. Subliminal perception – automatic, intuitive perceptual process that allows stimuli to be perceived even though it is below the threshold of conscious awareness.
9. Hindsight bias (I knew-it-all-along phenomenon) -- tendency to exaggerate, after learning an outcome, one’s ability to have foreseen or predicted that outcome.
10. Overconfidence phenomenon – tendency to be more confident than correct, to overestimate the accuracy of one’s beliefs. (Extension of hindsight bias to estimates of current knowledge.)
11. Confirmation bias – tendency to search for information that confirms one’s preconceptions; self-verification. (Reason self-images tend to be stable.)
12. Representativeness heuristic – intuitive strategy (“rule of thumb”) of judging the likelihood of something by how well it matches or represents particular prototypes (mental representations) of a category. (Can lead to over reliance on anecdotal evidence.)
13. Base rate fallacy – tendency to ignore or underuse base-rate information (information that describes most people) and instead to be influenced by distinctive features of the case being judged. (Perception of a group is overly influenced by its extreme members.)
14. Availability heuristic – tendency to judge the likeliness of things in terms of their availability in memory instead of actual statistical base rates, e.g., perceiving risks based on anecdotal evidence rather than actual risk.
15. Naturalistic Fallacy – tendency to define what is good in terms of what is observable, e.g., that which is typical is normal, what is normal is typical.
16. Counterfactual thinking – imagining alternative scenarios and outcomes (especially when easily imagined) that might have happened, but didn’t; mentally simulating what might have been. (More intense with significant events.)
17. Illusory correlation – perception of a relationship when none exists (events are random), or perception of a stronger relationship than actually exists.
18. Illusion of control – perception of uncontrollable or chance events as subject to one’s control or as more controllable than they are. (Common gambler illusions.)
19. Regression toward the average (mean) – statistical tendency for extreme scores or extreme behavior to return toward one’s average. (Events not likely to continue at either bad or good extreme.)
20. Emotional reasoning (affects of mood on judgements) – good moods stimulate positive thoughts about self, others, and the environment; negative moods stimulate unpleasant thoughts.

Self-Fulfilling Beliefs

21. Self-fulfilling prophecy – when one’s ideas, beliefs, or predictions unknowingly lead one to act in ways that fulfill or confirm those ideas, beliefs, or predictions.
22. Behavioral confirmation – type of self-fulfilling prophecy whereby people’s social expectations lead them to act in ways that cause others to confirm their expectations. (We get what we expect from others, creating vicious self-perpetuating cycles.)

Attitudes and Group Perceptions

23. **Prejudice** – negative prejudgement of a group and its individual members. Often based on negative stereotypes. Examples are racial and gender prejudice. Greatest prejudice typically is in most intimate social realms, e.g., marriage.
24. **Stereotype** – belief about the personal attributes of a group of people. Can be positive, negative, accurate, or inaccurate. Often overgeneralized, inaccurate, and resistant to new information or disconfirmation. Negative stereotypes can form the basis for prejudice.
25. **Stereotype threat** – when facing a negative stereotype, disruptive and self-confirming apprehension that one’s behavior will verify the negative stereotype. Type of self-fulfilling prophecy based on the existence of a negative stereotype. If others expect you to perform poorly, you do.
26. **Ingroup bias (ingroup-outgroup bias)** – tendency to favor one’s own group—those who share a sense of belonging and a common identity. Results from automatic tendency to categorize and classify ourselves and others into various groups. Group form of self-serving bias.
27. **Ethnocentrism** – belief that one’s own ethnic and cultural group is superior, and a corresponding disdain for all other groups. Type of ingroup bias.
28. **Outgroup homogeneity bias** – perception of outgroup members as more similar to one another than are ingroup members, i.e., they are all alike, we are diverse.
29. **Ingroup differentiation bias** – perception that members of our own group are diverse and heterogeneous, i.e., we aren’t all alike. Opposite of ingroup homogeneity bias.
30. **Ingroup homogeneity bias** – when ingroup is threatened, tendency to perceive all members of ingroup as being similar and members of the outgroup as being diverse. Opposite of ingroup differentiation bias.
31. **Group-serving bias (linguistic intergroup bias)** – explaining away outgroup members’ positive behavior, and attributing outgroup negative behaviors to their dispositions while excusing such behavior in one’s own group. Serves to protect collective self-esteem. Type of group-level fundamental attribution error.
32. **Just world phenomenon** – tendency for people to believe the world is just and that people therefore get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Leads to blaming victims and seeing success as deserved.

Rating and Evaluation Biases

33. **Halo effect (error)** – generally favorable attitude about someone—often based on a single outstanding trait or quality—that permeates all other judgments made about that person. Person seen as uniformly good.
34. **Leniency errors** – tendency to be too harsh or too lenient when evaluating others:
 - a. **Negative Leniency** – tendency to give evaluations lower than the true level of performance, i.e., “hard grader.”
 - b. **Positive Leniency** – tendency to give evaluations higher than the true level of performance, i.e., “easy grader.”
35. **Central tendency error** – tendency to avoid assigning extremely high or low evaluations, everyone is average.

Definitions drawn from Meyers, D. G. (1999), Social psychology (6th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Major Factors in Attitudes, Social and Group Influence, Persuasion, and Control

Attitude and Behavior—Self-persuasion

1. Role playing effect -- tendency to come to believe that the identity one role plays is one's true identity. (Zimbardo experiment.) (Basis of psychodrama.)
2. Saying-becomes-believing effect – tendency to say what others want to hear, and in so doing, come to believe what we say. (Similar to effect of role playing.)

Attitude and Behavior—Persuading Others

3. Foot-in-the-door-phenomenon – tendency for people who have first agreed to a small request to comply later with a larger request. Creating a momentum of compliance. Start small and build tactic.
4. Low-ball technique -- tactic for getting people to agree to something and a variation of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon. Getting people to agree to an initial request and then upping the ante.
5. Insufficient justification effect – reduction of cognitive dissonance (internal inconsistency) by internally justifying one's behavior when external justification is inadequate to explain behavior. People are unlikely to internalize forced behavior, i.e., harsh punishment not effective in creating self-discipline. Should use smallest incentive necessary to elicit desired behavior. (Example of principle that attitudes follow behavior.)
6. Overjustification effect – when people are given unnecessary rewards for behavior they already enjoy, tendency to be less motivated to maintain that behavior. Unnecessary rewards have a hidden cost, i.e., play becomes work.

Elements of Persuasion

7. Central route persuasion – focus on arguments and logic.
8. Peripheral route persuasion – focus on incidental cues and emotion.
9. Sleeper effect – delayed impact of a message that occurs when we remember the message but forget a reason for discounting it
10. Primacy effect – information presented first usually has the most influence, other things being equal.
11. Recency effect – information presented last sometimes has the most influence, but not as common as primacy effect.
12. Attitude inoculation – exposing people to weak attacks on their attitudes so that when stronger attacks come, they have refutations available.

Social and Group Influences

13. Conformity – change in behavior or belief resulting from real or imagined group pressure.
14. Compliance – conformity that involves publicly acting in accord with social pressure while privately disagreeing.
15. Group cohesion – the unity or “we-ness” of a group; strength of the bonds linking group members to the group; feelings of attraction for group members and the group itself; extent to which members coordinate their efforts toward achieving a goal
16. Obedience – behavior that occurs in response to an order given by someone in an authority position.
17. Evaluation apprehension – concern for how other are evaluating us.
18. Social loafing – tendency for people to exert less effort when they pool their efforts toward a common goal than when they are individually accountable.
19. Deindividuation – loss of self-awareness and evaluation apprehension; occurs in group situations that foster anonymity and draw attention away from the individual.
20. Group polarization – group-produced enhancement of members’ preexisting tendencies; a strengthening of the members’ average tendency, not a split within a group. Discussion typically strengthens the average inclination of group members, enhancing individuals’ initial leanings.
21. Pluralistic ignorance – false impression of how other people are thinking, feeling, or responding.
22. Groupthink – type of thinking groups engage in when concurrence-seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive in-group that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action. Dissent is suppressed in the interest of group harmony.

Resisting Social Influence

23. Reactance – motive to protect or restore one’s sense of freedom. Arises when freedom of action is threatened.

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