Social Influence and Social Cognition

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Other people are crucial part of our existence and play a key role in our happiness

Social psychologists have long specialized in the task of studying all aspects of social thought and social behaviour

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Social thought – *how and what we think about others,*
Social behaviour – *how we interact with other people and*
Social influence – *how other change our behaviour*
Attraction and love – *why we like/dislike other people*

Social thought – thinking about others

Attribution: Understanding the causes of others behavior

The process through which we attempt to *determine the causes behind others behavior is known as attribution*.

Attribution is *orderly process* where we *examine others behaviors for clues as to the causes* behind what they say and do and then reach our decisions.

We generally consider *basic information* like whether others actions stemmed from *internal causes (trait) or from external causes (luck)*

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Social thought – thinking about others

We focus on questions about

Consensus – whether other people behave in the same way as the person we are considering

Consistency – whether this person behaves in the same manner over time

Distinctiveness – whether this person behaves in the same way in different situation

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Social thought – thinking about others

Attribution: Some Sources of Bias

The correspondence bias*: overestimating the role of dispositional cues* – our strong tendency to explain others actions corresponding to or stemming from, dispositional (internal) causes even in the presence of clear situational (external) cues is called the correspondence bias.

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Why this bias occurs?

- *others actions reflect their underlying characteristics*
- *we then correct for any possible effect of the external world by taking into account these characteristics*
- *we don't make enough allowance for impact of external factors*

Social thought – thinking about others

The self-serving bias – is the tendency to take credit for positive behaviors / outcomes by attributing them to internal causes but to blame negative ones on external causes beyond our control

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Why it occurs?

- This bias stems from certain tendencies in the way we process social information. This happens as we expect to succeed and have a tendency to attribute expected outcomes to internal more than external causes
- Self-serving bias stems from our needs to protect enhance our self-esteem or the related desire to look good to others

Social thought – thinking about others

Both *cognitive and motivational factors* may well play a role in this kind of attributional error

Is self serving bias universal tendency occurring in all cultures?

This bias is more common in individualistic societies which emphasizes individual accomplishments than in collectivistic societies which emphasize group outcomes and harmony.

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Social Cognition – Processing Social Information

Identifying the *cause behind others behavior* is an important aspect of social thought

Social cognition involves *deciding what information* is most important and so worthy of our attention. We must then be able to store and retrieve this information from long term memory at appropriate times. We must also be able to manipulate this information to make judgments about people and predict their future actions. These tasks help us in making sense of the social world.

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Social Cognition – Processing Social Information

Dealing with inconsistent information: Paying attention to what doesn't fit.

We tend to pay much more attention to information that is unexpected or somehow inconsistent with our expectations than to information that is expected or consistent.

The above tendency seems to stem from the fact that we work harder to understand inconsistent information because it is unexpected and surprising. This is in turn leads to higher memories for such information which later influences our judgments.

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Social Cognition – Processing Social Information

The optimistic bias for task completion: We think we can do more, sooner, than we really can.

In predicting how long a given task will take, people tend to be overly optimistic. They predict that they can get the job done much sooner than actually turns out to be the case. This tendency is often recognized as *planning fallacy*

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What leads to this common error?

- Individuals predicting a task completion enter a planning mode of thought and focuses primarily on how they will perform the task in future, thereby not focusing on how they performed similar tasks in the past.

Social Cognition – Processing Social Information

Another factor that may play an important role in planning fallacy is motivation to complete the task. When predicting what will happen in future, individuals often guess that what *will* happen is what they *want* to happen

Counterfactual thinking: The effects of considering 'what might have been'

Thoughts about what might have been are known in social psychology as counterfactual thinking and occur in wide range of situations including disappointments

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Social Cognition – Processing Social Information

Engaging in counterfactual thinking can produce a number of effects

- Such thinking can either boost or depress current moods

- If individual imagine better outcomes than actually occurred they may experience regret, envy or dissatisfaction especially if they do not feel capable of obtaining better outcomes in future

- Counterfactual thinking can also help individuals understand why negative outcomes occured

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

Attitudes can be defined as *lasting evaluations of virtually any and every aspect the social world – issues, ideas, persons, social groups or objects.*

Attitudes generally involve an affective component (like/dislike), a cognitive component (beliefs) and a behavioral component (action)

Attitudes are formed through the basic process of learning like *operant conditioning (reward for correct behavior), observation learning (adopt views of role models) and classical conditioning (affective aspect)*

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

Persuasion: using message to change attitude - Changing attitudes of people has been the biggest business of the twenty-first centaury and using persuasive messages to do has proved to be really effective.

- Experts are more persuasive than non-experts
- Messages that appear to be designed to not change attidues
- Attractive sources
- Distraction is used to change attitudes
- Two-sided approach when people hold contrary views
- Emotions
- Fast speaking people

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

The cognitive approach to persuasion – people process persuasive messages in two distinct ways

- Systematic processing (central route) to persuasion involves careful consideration of message content, the idea it contains etc
- Heuristic processing (peripheral route) to persuasion involves the use of simple rules of thumbs ot mental shortcuts (experts can be trusted belief)

When do we use the different approaches?

- Modern theories of persuasion like elaboration-likelihood model

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

and the heuristic-systematic model suggest that -

- We engage in effortful type of processing when our capacity to process the information relating to the persuasive message is high or when we are motivated to do so

- In contrast we engage in less effortful processing when we lack the ability or capacity to process more carefully or when our motivation to perform such tasks are low

- Research suggests that uninteresting or irrelevant persuasive messages produce low persuasion

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

Cognitive dissonance – how we change our own attitudes

Induced compliance – are situations in which we feel compelled to say or do things inconsistent with our own attitudes. This may in turn lead to changes in privates attitudes.

The term cognitive dissonance refers to feelings we experience when we notice a gap between two attitudes we hold or between our attitudes and behavior. We reduce this dissonance through

- We can change our attitude or behavior to be consistent
- We can acquire new information that supports our attitudes
- We can engage in trivialization

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Attitudes: Evaluating the social world

All approaches of attitude change mentioned above are direct methods of dissonance reduction

There are a number of ***indirect techniques*** to dissonance reduction

- Steele (1993) suggests individuals experiencing dissonance may focus not so much on reducing the gap between their attitudes and behavior as on the *self affirmation* – efforts to restore positive self-evaluations that are threatened by the dissonance.

Self affirmation can be achieved by focusing on the positive self attributes – good things about oneself.

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Social Behaviour: Interacting with others

We not only think about others but also interact with them and in this influence them and are influenced too at times

Prejudice: distorted views of the social world – are powerful negative attitudes towards the members of specific social group based solely on their membership in that group

Several origins of prejudice

- The realistic conflict theory suggests that prejudice stems from competition between social groups over valued commodities or opportunities

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Social Behaviour: Interacting with others

Social categorization - the diving of the world into distinct social categories like us and them generate sharp contrasting feelings and beliefs that are usually attached to members of in-groups and to members of various out-groups. Persons in us category are viewed in favorable terms, while those in the them group are perceived negatively

We acquire prejudiced attitudes through learning. We acquire them from people around us through social learning. Countless experience where teachers/parents/friends express prejudice views make children acquire these attitudes

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Social Behaviour: Interacting with others

The role of stereotypes – stereotypes are cognitive frameworks consisting of knowledge and beliefs about specific social groups – suggesting that by and large, all members of these groups posses certain traits, at least to a degree.

Once an individual acquires a stereotype he tends to notices information that fits the cognitive frameworks and remembers consists facts from memories

Stereotypes act as labor-saving device (quick & dirty judgments) They also individuals to protect and bolster their social identity

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Social Behaviour: Interacting with others

How to tackle prejudice

Learning not to hate – discouraging the transmission of bigoted views while encouraging more positive attitudes towards others

Increasing the contact between peoples from different groups which will lead to realization of similarities between people

Resetting the boundary between us and them – re-categorization – somehow inducing individuals to shift the boundary between us and them reduces prejudice

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Social influence: Changing others behaviour

Social influence involves attempts by one or more persons to change the attitudes or behavior of one or more others. Three important forms of this influence exists

Conformity – *pressure to think or act like other people* stem from the fact that in many contexts there are spoken or unspoken rules indicating how we should behave. These rules are known as social norms

Descriptive norms – tells us what most people do in a given situation (generally appropriate or desirable behavior)

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Social influence: Changing others behaviour

Injunctive norms – specify what should (or should not) be done and not merely what people do in specific situations

Why do we comply?

Each of us has a strong desire to be liked by others. Experience teaches that one way to reach this goal is to appear to be as similar to others as possible

We confirm to others to as we have a strong desire to be right – to hold the right views, dress in right style and so on

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Social influence: Changing others behaviour

Compliance – when we want someone to do something for us we use certain tricks to getting people to say yes to us – or comply to our request. Some strategies for compliance are

Tactic based on liking – ingratiation which is making people like us help people in complying with us. We achieve this through

-Self-enhancing tactics (enhance personal appeal)

- Other enhancing tactics (flattering target persons)

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Tactics based on commitment or consistency (foot in the door techniques) – getting others to say yes to our requests are based on obtaining an initial small commitment from the target person

Tactics based on reciprocity (door in the face) – instead of stating with a small request we start with a big request that people put down and then make a small request

Tactics based on scarcity (playing hard to get) – a tactics in which individuals try to create the impression that they are very popular or very much in demand

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Social influence: Changing others behaviour

Obedience (social influence by demand) – most influential way one can change others people behaviors is through *direct orders* – simply telling the other person what to do.

Why people show obedience?

- The source take the responsibility of the actions of participants
- Source holds clear signs of authority (authority is to be obeyed)
- Commands to be carried out are gradual

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Attraction and Love

Similarity – the more similar people are to us (attitudes, personality or habits)the more we like them as such persons provide us validation for our views or our personal characteristics. This make us feel good and our liking for them increases

Affective states – positive feeling or moods – whatever their source – cause us to like others we meet while experiencing them; while negative moods cause us to dislike others we meet when we are feeling low.

- If positive feeling are produces by something another person says

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Attraction and Love

or by the way the person looks we tend to like that individual . But even our positive feelings have nothing to do with the person – as in the unexpectedly high grade incident or if we meet someone in a pleasant setting

Physical attractiveness – most important factor affecting interpersonal attraction is *physical beauty*. Research suggests that we are suckers for a pretty or handsome face.

- Physical attractive people make us feel good
- Physical attractiveness is associated with good health ang good reproductive capacity.

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Attraction and Love

What make people attractive? – it is dependent a lot on cultures however most people agrees on what is attractive and not

Among women two distinct patterns of facial features are viewed as attractive: a '*cute*' pattern involving childlike features with large widely spaced eyes and a small nose and chin (Meg Ryan) and a '*mature*' pattern involving prominent cheekbones, high eyebrows, large pupils and a big smile (Julia Roberts)

Two cluster of attractive features for men are youthful appearance (Leonardo DiCaprio) and mature masculine (Harrison Ford)

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Judgments of attractiveness do not depend solely on facial features and are influenced by other aspects of peoples appearance

Physique is another important determinant of attraction, at least among young people. Persons whose physique matches the popular model – currently slim but muscular – tend to receive higher evaluations than persons who depart from this model

Love (most intense form of attraction) *what is and how do we know*

Romantic love is a form of love involving feelings of strong attraction

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Attraction and Love

and sexual desire towards another person. There are other forms of love like companionate love

Three components are central to romantic love

- Before we can say that we are in love the idea of romantic love must be present in our culture
- We must experience intense emotional arousal when in the presence of an appropriate person
- these feelings must be mixed with the desire to be loved by the object of our affection, coupled with fears that the relationship might end

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Attraction and Love

Love (how and why it occurs)

Romantic love often develops quite suddenly. People report that falling in love feels like being struck by emotional lightning

We are prepared to fall in love by our earlier relationship

Through the ages the reproductive successes of our species depended on two factors

- A desire on the part of both men and women to engage in sexual intercourse
- An interest in investing the time and effort required to feed and protect offspring

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Attraction and Love

Love (why it sometimes dies)

- When partners discover that they are dissimilar in important ways, love can be weakened or even die
- Another and potentially serious problem is simple boredom
- Third jealousy can undermine loving relationship
- Fourth changing patterns of affect
- Fifth partly as function of early childhood experiences people differ in their attachment style
- Interactions that can only be described as self defeating patterns of behavior sometimes emerge.

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