

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Conceptualizing errors in social cognition
- ☰ Cognitive-experiential self theory
- ☰ Paying attention to inconsistent information
- ☰ Planning fallacy
- ☰ Automatic vigilance
- ☰ Potential costs of thinking too much
- ☰ Counterfactual thinking
- ☰ Magical thinking

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Conceptualizing errors in social cognition

- It is an important aspect of human nature that we always consciously aspire to think rationally or logically so that our decisions or judgements about people or events are not wrong. However, it is easier said than done. Social psychologists have found out that the motivation to reason in an error-free manner is often overpowered by the adaptive processes where we tend to reduce the cognitive effort required to understand the social world. Keeping this in mind, this lecture is devoted to the several sources of errors in social cognition :
 - Cognitive-experiential self theory
 - Paying attention to inconsistent information
 - Planning fallacy
 - Automatic vigilance
 - Potential costs of thinking too much
 - Counterfactual thinking
 - Magical thinking

Cognitive-experiential self theory

- Cognitive-experiential self theory posits that errors in our judgement results from our intuition based on past experiences precedes the rational thinking while analyzing a problem or a situation.
 - For example, a basketball player prefers a pair of old shoes (that may be dangerous in terms of injuries owing to inadequate body-balance) to a pair of new and proper basketball shoes as it occurs to him that the old shoes had proved to be 'lucky' for him in the past.



Paying attention to inconsistent information

- Information inconsistent with a person, his/her role or any event may be highly effective in attracting our attention but it may distract the observer or the listener from the consistent and relevant information. Social psychologists have provided evidence that inconsistent information is better remembered than the consistent information about gender roles (Bardach & Park, 1996). According to their study, the qualities that are usually not associated with a gender ('nurturant' for males and 'competitive' for females) were better remembered by participants than those that are usually associated with a gender ('adventurous' for male and 'emotional' for females). These findings do indicate that the inconsistent information may overshadow the important consistent information.

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Planning fallacy

- When it comes to deciding about the time we will take to complete a task, we often overshoot the time period that we had assigned to ourselves. This is known as planning fallacy. The reason for this is that while initially taking the decision about the time required, rather than focusing on the time we had taken to accomplish a task in the past, we generally focus on events or actions to occur in future. This tendency disallows us to do a realistic estimate of time needed. Furthermore, as social psychologists have founded out, at the time of initial decision-making, even if one is reminded of the excessive time incurred in the past, the delay is usually attributed to some external factors rather than one's own capabilities to the finish the work in time.

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Automatic vigilance

- Social psychologists have indicated that rather than focusing on the common aspects of a situation, we tend to focus more on the negative aspects of the situation. Thus, an understanding of the common aspects of a social phenomenon may not take place as adequate attention was not given to these. In their study, Hansen and Hansen (1988) noted that their participants were easily able to locate an angry face in the crowd of normal or happy people but, locating a normal face in the crowd of angry people was not as easy.

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Potential costs of thinking too much

- There are times when we overdo careful thinking and this may result in confusion, frustration and wrong judgement too. Wilson and Schooler (1991), in the study, asked half of the participants to rate the several strawberry jams and the other half of them to analyze the reasons for the ratings they themselves gave to each jam. The researchers also took the opinion of experts (who professionally compared various products) about the correctness of judgement made of the two group of participants. They found out that, according to the experts, the judgement of the second half of the participants (consisting of participants who analyzed their own rating) were not as accurate as that of the first half (consisting of participants who simply rated the jams).



Counterfactual thinking

- We regret our actions more when we find out that ours was a rather unusual behaviour. For example, a student who usually goes to school on his bicycle, went to the school on-foot on the day he became the victim of an accident. Another student went to the school on-foot as he usually does. It is common to expect that the first rather the second student will be more regretful of his actions. The reason for the more regret in the case of the first student is the alternatives that were not chosen by him. Both the students might have required our sympathies equally but perhaps more sympathies (due to more regret) would be given to the first student.

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Magical thinking

- Magical thinking is the kind of thinking that involves irrational assumptions often associated with (Zusne & Jones, 1989) :
 - law of similarity, or
 - law of contagion
- Law of similarity states that we assume that people similar to each other in appearance may be having similar fundamental characteristics.
 - For example, some children might not like to eat a biscuit in the shape of a house lizard.
- Law of contagion is the belief that when two people or objects come in contact with each other, they pass on their properties to one another and such an impact last long after the contact is over.
 - For example, one might not like to use wear the coat used by an HIV patient even after it is dry-cleaned.