

PSYC UN2640: Intro to Social Cognition
Columbia UNY
Study guide, definitions & notes

Cognition: perceiving, interpreting, remembering and using info [aka our *thoughts*]
Social: related to or about people

Social Cognition

- o **Social cognition:** how people perceive, interpret, remember and use info about themselves and others

Influenced by needs, wants, and expectations
Active construction of meaning

The New Look Movement

- o Perception is a decision process
- o Perceiver decides whether a thing is A and not B
- o Process could be conscious or not conscious
- o Also influenced by our expectations, needs and wants

Framing Effects

- o People make decisions based on how info is presented
 - Steak is 80% lean
 - Steak is 20% fat
 - More likely to want steak when it says 80% lean

Confirmation Bias

- o We tend to seek info that confirms our ideas and neglect info that disconfirms an idea
- o We tend to interpret ambiguous info as confirmatory info

Horoscopes, psychic readings

Processing

- o **Bottom-up processing:** what you see is what you *think*

- Data-driven [color, shape, smell, sound]
 - Guided by the immediately presented stimulus
 - Stimulus Info first Cognition follows
 - Guys think with their dick—look at attraction first

- o **Top-down processing:** what you *think* is what you see

- Concept-driven
 - Guided by prior thoughts and knowledge
 - Cognition first stimulus info follows
 - Girls think first before judging attractiveness

Schemas

- o **Schemas:** mental frameworks that we use to make sense of social situations and organize our world

- Help us go beyond info that is given [make inferences!]
 - Guide processing of info

- o Schemas reside primarily in the **prefrontal cortex** of the brain (social part of the brain)

- o Think categories

- o *Advantages*

- Increase ability to understand remember events
 - Provide structure in an ambiguous setting

- o *Disadvantages*

- Biased perceptions
 - Confirmation bias—seek schema-confirming info
 - Self-fulfilling prophecies

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

- o **Self-fulfilling prophecy:** schemas lead to expectations about other people and these expectations influence how we behave around them

Example: We have a stereotype that Italians are friendly. Bianca is Italian

so I may act toward Bianca in a friendly way. My friendly behavior may be reciprocated by Bianca and if others engage in positive social interactions with her, and she may become a friendlier person, thus confirming my initial expectations.

Confirmation Bias v. Self- Fulfilling Prophecies

o Confirmation biases...

Tendency to interpret, seek and create info in ways that verify existing beliefs

/ seek out information that verifies my expectation

Involves 1 person

o Self-fulfilling prophecies...

Schemas create expectations of a target person change our behavior toward the target person based on expectations target person acts in a way that confirms our expectations

My expectation of *your* behavior leads to you confirming my expectation

Involves 2 people affecting each other

Salience

o **Salience:** the extent to which we attend to particular features of the person or situation that we are responding to

o We are more likely to judge people on the basis of characteristics of salience, which attract our attention when we see someone with them

Things that are unusual, negative, colorful, bright and moving are more salient and thus more likely to be attended to

Accessibility

o **Accessibility:** we use whichever schema is at the forefront of our minds [aka the most *accessible* schema]

o Can be **chronically accessible:** things that are important to us and that we spend a lot of time thinking about

- o Can be **situationally accessible**: *priming*

Priming

- o **Priming**: a technique in which info is temporarily brought into memory through exposure o situational events, which can then influence judgments entirely out of awareness

Supraliminal priming: priming at the conscious level [ex: words, images, scents, music, etc.]

Subliminal priming: outside of conscious awareness [ex: stimuli flashing on a screen]

- o Priming DOES NOT equal mind control
- o Priming impacts behavior but does not force you to do something against your own will
- o Helps *disambiguate*

Thought Processes

- o **Automatic processing**: unaware, nonconscious, unintentional, effortless thinking
- o **Controlled processing**: aware, conscious, intentional, effortful thinking

Deliberately size up and think about something

Both *motivation* and *ability* are required for controlled processes

Motivation: think more when relevant, important, or interesting to you

Ability: think more when less demanded (from time or distraction) o Most

behaviors result from a combo of both types

Heuristics

- o **Heuristics:** mental shortcuts or “rules of thumb”

Overriding requires motivation and ability

- o **Representative heuristic:** making a judgment on the basis of similarity

If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck... than it's a duck

Ignore *base rate* information

Base rates: the likelihood that events occur across a large population

- o **Availability heuristic:** basing a judgment on its *ease* of mental retrieval

If it feels easier to recall, than it must be correct

Processing fluency: the ease with which we can process info in our environments

Biases

- o **False consensus bias:** the tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people hold similar views to your own

- o **Projection bias:** the tendency to assume that others share our cognitive and affective states

- o **Overconfidence bias:** a tendency to be overconfident in our own skills, abilities and judgments

- o **Optimistic bias:** tendency to believe that positive outcomes are more likely to happen than negative ones, particularly in relation to ourselves versus others

- o **Depressive realism:** social judgments about the future are less positively skewed and often more accurate than those who do not have depression

- o **Planning fallacy:** tendency to overestimate the amount that we can accomplish over a particular time frame

Counterfactuals

- o **Counterfactual:** imagining “what could have been”

Upward counterfactual: imagining how things could have been *better*

Downward counterfactual: imagining how things could have been *worse*

- o Example: bronze medal winners? “I almost didn’t get a medal!”—downward counterfactual
- o Example: silver medal winners? “I almost got the gold!”—upward counterfactual

Anchoring and Adjustment

- o **Anchoring and adjustment:** the accessibility of the initial info frequently prevents this adjustment from occurring—leading us to weight initial info too heavily and thereby insufficiently move our judgment away from it

Example: You have been in a situation where you are beginning a course with a new professor and you know one of your close friends doesn’t like him. You may be thinking that you want to go beyond your negative expectation and prevent this knowledge from biasing your judgment. However the accessibility of this information does not allow you adjust your judgment.

Action v. Inaction

- o Undesired **actions** are more regretted in the short-term

Didn’t want to study for exam, regret it when get bad grade, but isn’t going to affect you years down the road

- o Undesired **inactions** are more regretted in the long-term

Never spoke to the girl you fell in love with at first sight, regret 50 years down the road when you are alone and single

Themes in Social Cognition

o **Limited processing capacity:** humans *cannot* physically perceive, encode, store and retrieve everything

So... must efficiently simplify processing:

Less info

Top-down processing (schemas)

Heuristics

o **Determinants of processing:** amount of processing depends on *motivation* and *ability*



o **Types of processing:** perceiving can be *automatic* or *controlled*

