

THE SELF

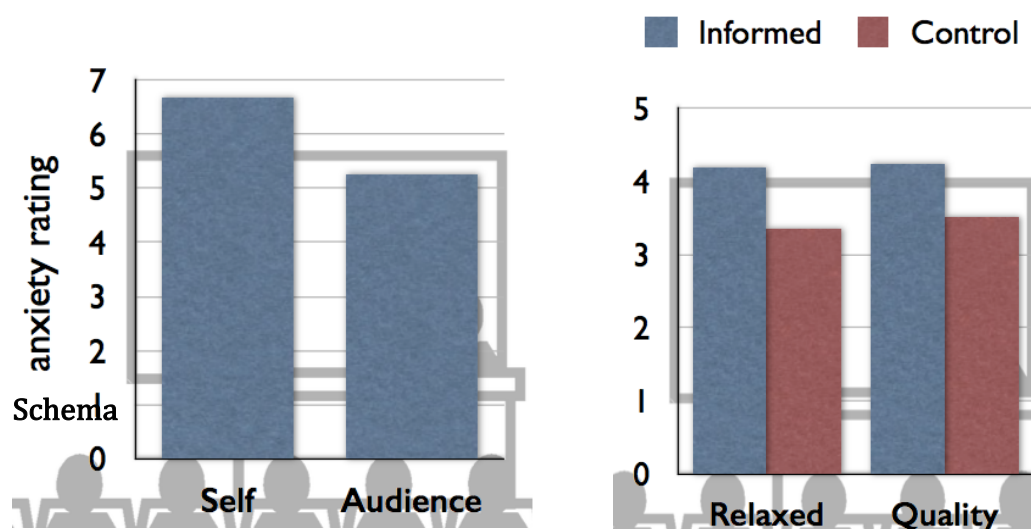
Chapter 2

The Spotlight Effect

- Self at the centre of our world
- The belief that everyone is attending to us
- From a logical point of view, if we are all self-obsessed then we are not paying much attention to each other
- In reality, other people do not notice us as much as we think
 - Participants wear embarrassing Barry Manilow t-shirt
 - Temporarily enter room where 6 others are doing questionnaires
 - Participant later estimates how many will recall the picture on their t-shirt (estimated rate = 50%)
 - Observers asked to recall who was on the participant's t-shirt (actual rate = <25%)
 - Actual recall rate was much lower than the estimated rate

Illusion of transparency

- Are our internal states as transparent to others as they are to ourselves?
- E.g. anxiety, disgust, nervousness
- Ps give impromptu speech
 - Rated how anxious they think they appeared
 - ⇒ 0 (not at all) to 10 (very)
 - ⇒ Tend to predict 6.5
 - Audience also rated speaker on apparent anxiety
 - ⇒ Rated just above 5
 - Either we are overestimating how transparent our internal states are
- Does informing speakers that others don't pick up anxiety reduce anxiety and improve performance?
 - Ps either informed or not informed (control)
 - Give speech and audience rated how relaxed they appeared
 - ⇒ 1 (not at all) to very (7)
 - Audience rated speech quality
 - ⇒ 1 (very poor) to 7 (very high)
 - Found that informed group rated more relaxed and better quality than control group



- Self-schema are beliefs about self that organise and guide the processing of self-relevant information
- Self information is stored as separate context-sensitive nodes
- Different contexts activate different nodes
 - Therefore, different self occurs in different contexts

Development of self

- Social roles are roles that we play
 - Initially self conscious, but over time our roles become internalised and implicit
- Social identity
 - Group membership helps determine sense of self
 - ⇒ E.g. race, religion, gender, sexuality
 - Context activates sense of self
 - ⇒ E.g. male and female children describe self in terms of gender if they are in the minority in a social situation
- Social comparison
 - How do you know you're clever? Would you feel less clever in the company of geniuses?
 - Big-fish-little-pond effect
 - ⇒ Self-concept correlates with peer ability
 - ⇒ Compared academic self-concept of students from high and low achieving schools and found that academic self-concept depends on own and others' accomplishments
 - ⇒ This is why we (sometimes) take pleasure in an envied peer's failure
 - Social comparison can diminish satisfaction
 - ⇒ E.g. when we experience an increase in status we "compare upward"

Looking glass self

- Self-concept through the eyes of others
- Effective interaction requires taking the other's perspective, and as we look through their eyes we potentially see our self
- Reflection forms that basis for our self-concept
- However, it may be that we are not really seeing ourselves as others see us, but instead how we think/hope others see us
- Lewinsohn et al (1980)
 - Ps took part in group task
 - ⇒ 3 minute self-introduction speech
 - ⇒ 20 minute conversation
 - 17 desirable attributes rated by self and by others
 - ⇒ E.g. friendly, reasonable
 - ⇒ 1 (not characteristic) to 7 scale (very characteristic)
 - Self-rating was higher than observer rating
 - ⇒ We overestimate our good points

Self-knowledge

- We know ourselves well, and intuition is often accurate
 - E.g. we can predict sadness as the loss of a loved one
- However, intuition can also be inaccurate
 - E.g. predicting behaviour, feelings, and what we want
 - Self-reports can be untrustworthy

Explaining our own behaviour

- Ps given electric shocks of increasing intensity
- All Ps given placebo before shocks
- Half of the Ps told the pill will lead to symptoms consistent with shock (e.g. heart palpitations)
 - These Ps endured up to 4 times as much shock as the control Ps
- When asked to explain behaviour “Why did you endure as much shock?”, instead of saying it was because they had been told the pill would result in symptoms, they claimed they didn’t even think about the pill
 - However, because the only difference between the two groups was this false information, the extra endurance must be attributed to it
 - Therefore, they couldn’t accurately explain their behaviour

Do we know what makes us happy?

- Is mood influenced by the day of the week?
- People report that Monday is the worst day of the week, and this is often referred to as “blue Monday”
- In a diary study, Ps recorded their mood for 42 days (6 weeks)
 - Found that mood is similar from Monday to Friday, rising on Saturday and Sunday

Can we predict our behaviours?

- Females were asked how they’d react to a sexist remark
 - 95% said they would call the person to account and say its unacceptable
- Then have conversation with 3 others (about ‘who to select for survival on a desert island’) and confederate makes 3 sexist remarks
 - E.g. “we need more women on the island to keep the men satisfied”
 - Only about 42% actually said something

Predicting feelings

- Affective forecast
- Woman IMAGINE how they’d feel if sexually harassed at a job interview
 - Almost 30% predicted they would feel anger
 - Almost none of them predicted they would feel fear
- Then compared with how they actually felt when harassed in a real (simulated) interview
 - Only 15% were angry
 - 40% were fearful
- Important in court cases where victim did not behave as others anticipated

Predicting our desires

- Knowing what we want
- The intuitive idea is that if we get what we want, we feel happy

- Problem is we often 'miswant'
 - Overestimate the positive impact
 - ⇒ E.g. happiness when favourite soccer team wins the league is not as powerful/long-lasting as expected
 - Overestimate the negative impact
 - ⇒ E.g. predicted devastation felt if you contract AIDs or lose your job is not as powerful as expected
 - ⇒ Psychological immune system means that we are resilient to adversity
- Good things are rarely as good as we expect, and bad things are rarely as bad as we expected
- Dunn et al., 2003
 - Students estimated how happy they'd be if assigned to a desirable or undesirable dorm
 - Student's happiness measured on year after dorm assignment
 - Found that all students were equally happy after one year despite predicting unhappiness if assigned to the undesirable dorm

Self-esteem

- Our overall evaluation of the self
 - I.e. the sum of our self-schemas
- Often viewed as a personality characteristic, i.e. a trait
- Most people range from moderate to high in self-esteem
 - This seems to be very adaptive and valuable for survival and overall quality of life
- Low self-esteem is associated with dysfunction
 - E.g. depression, drug use, loneliness

We try to maintain self-esteem

- When facing failure high self-esteem people tend to
 - Perceive others as failing too
 - Exaggerate superiority over others to improve relativity (e.g. I failed but she did terribly)
- The more upset people are after a failure, the more likely they are to offer self-protective excuses
- "Self-esteem maintenance motivation"
 - If SE is challenged and falls below a certain point, we seek to replenish it

Implicit egotism

- Self-esteem can be measured a variety of ways, including self-reports
- Also use implicit measures, such as implicit egotism
- This is the idea that we prefer people, places, or things that remind us of our self
- E.g. "Susie sells seashells by the sea shore"
- People possess favourable, unconscious associations about themselves
 - People are disproportionately likely to live in US states or cities that resemble their name
 - People are disproportionately likely to have careers that resemble their names

- People are disproportionately likely to marry other people whose surnames begin with the same letter as their own
- The name letter effect
 - Pairs of letters presented that did or did not include letters from Ps name
 - Instructed circle one of the two letters without thinking
 - Found that Ps preferred letters from their own name

Strategies to maintain self-esteem

- Internal strategies
 - How we assess our self
 - Self-efficacy and control
 - Self-serving biases
- External strategies
 - How we present our self to others

Perceived self-efficacy

- Elderly adults implicitly primed with a negative or positive stereotype of ageing
 - 0.066 second (flash) presentation of negative or positive stereotypes
 - Asked “where did you see the flash on the screen”
- Perceived performance increased in positive prime condition
 - They believed they could perform better after primed using positive stereotypes
- What about actual performance?
 - Negative priming had no effect on memory performance
 - Positive priming increased performance on memory test
 - ⇒ Therefore, perceived self-efficacy influenced behaviour

Perceived control

- People with higher perceived self-control perform better academically, enjoy better relationships, earn more money, have better mental health
- People with lower perceived self-control blame others for failing and this hinders achievement
 - E.g. low grades due to poor textbook, teacher or unlucky exam
- Langer & Rodin: giving people control
 - Nursing home patients treated in one of two ways
 - ⇒ Low: passive care-receiving role (mothering sympathetic care)
 - ⇒ High: make own decisions and take responsibility
 - 3 weeks later, patient performance was rated
 - ⇒ E.g. alertness, activity, happiness
 - ⇒ Rated by self, interviewers and nurses
 - ⇒ Low control was further debilitated
 - ⇒ High control showed 93% improvement
 - Debilitated condition of patients partly a function of the institution itself

Self-serving biases

- “Psychological crash helmet”
- 2 easy steps to maintain a positive self-image
 1. Associate one self with success (internal) and accept credit for successes

2. Distance one self from failure (external) make excuses for failures
- E.g. athletes take credit when they win and blame others when they lose
 - Most people see themselves as better than average, however this is not statistically possible
 - E.g. couples and group members believe they do more tasks than their partner credits them for
 - Males estimate they do 42% of house-work, female partners estimate it at 33%
 - Group members perceived contribution to a joint task typically sums to >100%
 - Such self-serving biases protect self-esteem and are adaptive
 - Depressed and anxious persons do not exhibit self-efficacy bias
 - Tend to be more realistic (called depressive realism)
 - Self-serving bias acts as a buffer against stress
 - Persons scoring higher on self-efficacy recovered better after escaping from the World Trade Centre

Optimism bias

- We expect things to turn out well
- Ps estimated chance of 42 positive and negative events happening to themselves relative to their classmates
 - Tend to believe that positive things are much more likely to happen to ourselves and negative things are much less likely
- Optimism associated with physical and psychological well-being
- But unrealistic optimism can increase our vulnerability
 - Marriage applicants accurately predict divorce rates (50%), but assess own chance of divorce at 0%
 - Teens presume they're less susceptible to contradicting AIDs than others
 - Optimistic gamblers persist more than pessimistic gamblers when piling up debt

Self-presentation

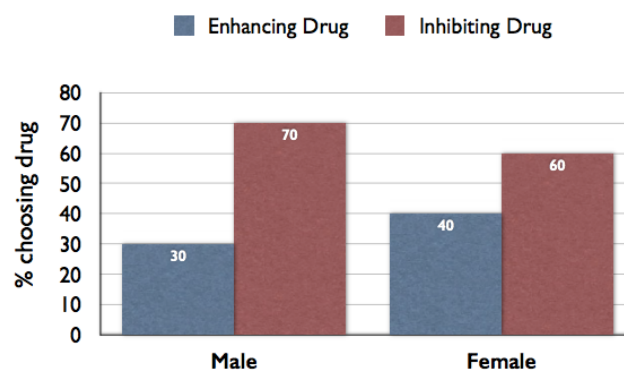
- Humans perceive themselves in a self-enhancing way and we try to ensure others see us in the same way
- I.e. we engage in 'Impression Management'
 - Two types are false modesty and self-handicapping

False modesty

- Presenting a different self to what is felt
- Ps wrote an account of a recent 'success experience'
 - Public condition: write name on sheet of paper and told they'd read their story to a group and discuss it
 - Private condition: not asked to supply name/meet and discuss
- Existence of various story dimensions encoded
 - Received help from others, emotional support from others
- In public condition, much more likely to acknowledge help and emotional support from others than when in private condition
 - Shallow gratitude

Self-handicapping

- Externalise failure, internalise success
- People sometimes seek obstacles that impede success
 - Fail and we have a ready made excuse
 - Succeed and we do so against the odds
- Ps complete difficult 20 item aptitude test and told “Yours was one of the best score seen to date”
- Before completing 2nd test, Ps offered drug A or B
 - Drug A: aids intellectual performance
 - Drug B: impedes intellectual performance
- Ps preferred to take Drug B



CHAPTER TWO DEFINITIONS

Spotlight effect – the belief that others are paying more attention to our appearance and behaviour than they really are

Illusion of transparency – the illusion that our concealed emotions leak out and can be easily read by others

Self-concept – a person’s answer to the question, “Who am I?”

Self-schema – beliefs about self that organised and guide the processing of self-relevant information

Possible selves – images of what we dream or of dread becoming in the future

Social comparison – evaluating one’s abilities and opinions by comparing oneself with others

Individualism – the concept of giving priority to one’s own goals over group goals and defining one’s identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications

Collectivism – giving priority to the goals of one’s group (often one’s extended family or work group) and defining one’s identity accordingly

Interdependent self – construing one’s identity in relation to others

Planning fallacy – the tendency to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task

Immune neglect – the human tendency to underestimate the speed and strength of the ‘psychological immune system’, which enables emotional recovery and resilience after bad things happen

Dual attitudes – different implicit (automatic) and explicit (consciously controlled) attitudes towards the same object. Verbalised explicit attitudes may change with education and persuasion, implicit attitudes change slowly, with practice that forms new habits

Self-esteem – a person's overall self-evaluation or sense of self-worth

Locus of control - the extent to which people perceive outcomes as intentionally controllable by their own efforts or as externally controlled by chance, powerful others or outside forces

Learned helplessness – the sense of hopelessness and resignation learned when a human or animal perceives no control over repeated bad events

Self-serving bias – the tendency to perceive oneself favourably

Self-serving attributions – a form of self-serving bias; the tendency to attribute positive outcomes to oneself and negative outcomes to other factors

Defensive pessimism – the adaptive value of anticipating problems and harnessing one's anxiety to motivate effective action

False consensus effect – the tendency to overestimate the commonality of one's opinions and one's undesirable or unsuccessful behaviours

False uniqueness effect – the tendency to underestimate the commonality of one's abilities and one's desirable or successful behaviours

Group-serving bias – explaining away outgroup members' positive behaviours; also attributing negative behaviours to their dispositions (while excusing such behaviour by one's own group)

Self-handicapping – protecting one's self-image with behaviours that create a handy excuse for later failure

Self-presentation – the act of expressing oneself and behaving in ways designed to create a favourable impression or an impression that corresponds to one's ideals

Self-monitoring – being attuned to the way one presents oneself in social situations and adjusting one's performance to create the desired impression