

The Self in Social Psychology

Disclaimer: there are many class demonstrations not included in the notes (to prevent ruining them); if you miss this lecture, you should get the notes from someone in the class.

Why Study the Self?

- Social psychology is concerned with how individuals construe and create social reality
 - So you should not be surprised to find a whole chapter on the self in social psychology textbooks
 - Lewin famously said: $B = f(P, S)$
 - Behavior is a function of the _____ AND _____
 - Personality psychologists stress P
 - And sociologists focus on S
- Social psychologists
- Often put more stress on S than P, but both are important factors for predicting behavior
 - When they talk about the self, they carve it up into into two parts

The Self in Two Parts

- Private Self
 - The self as _____
 - Personality, thoughts, feelings
 - “I” (“Who am I?”)
- Public Self
 - The self as _____
 - Social roles, impression management
 - “Me” (“What do you think about me?”)

Class Demonstration

Actor-Observer Bias

- One of the most established phenomenon in social psychology
- YOUR behavior is attributed to _____
- OTHER'S behavior is attributed to _____

Research (Nisbett, 1973)

- He used 20 sets of traits
- They rated a news anchor (Walter Cronkite), their best friends, and themselves
- They always had the option of checking “it depends on the situation”
- Did they use that option equally?
 - Order in which the option was used the most:
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Explanations for Actor-Observer Bias

The _____ explanation

- You know yourself
- Thus, you see more _____ in your behavior across situations

Actor-Observer Bias & Attributions

- Attributions (defined): The study of assigning _____ to behavior
- P-driven explanations = “_____ attributions”
 - Something inside the person causes behavior
- S-driven explanations = “_____ attributions”
 - Something outside the person causes behavior

The _____ Attribution Error (FAE)

- Your text talks only about half of the actor-observer bias
- FAE = observer bias (the tendency to attribute others' behavior to their personality more than to their situation)
- But actor bias is just as important

Questions

- When they are the **observer** of someone else's behavior, people tend to make (internal or external) attributions?
- When they are the **actor**, rating themselves, people tend to make (internal or external) attributions?

Visual perspective explanation

- Besides the familiarity explanation, actor-observer bias might also be caused by differences in visual perspective

The videotape study

- Michael Ross asked two strangers to hold a conversation that was videotaped
- Subjects then made attributions about both their and their partner's behavior
- Half did so without viewing the tape (the normal perspective for _____)
- The other half did so while **viewing the tape** (the normal perspective for observers)

Without viewing the tape

- These subjects showed _____ **bias**
 - “I was talkative because my partner was quiet”
 - “My partner didn't talk because he is shy”
- OR
 - “I didn't talk much because I was nervous about the camera”
 - “My partner sure is a talkative person!”

While viewing the tape

- These subjects made more _____ attributions for themselves (as well as their partners)
 - “I guess I'm pretty talkative”
 - “I didn't realize what a nervous person I am”
- Instead of blaming their own talkativeness on a shy partner, or their nervousness on the camera, subjects judged themselves as an _____ might

In sum

- Ross _____ the actor-observer bias by switching subjects' perspective to that of an observer
- Why?

Ross's "visionary" explanation

- Looking outward at the world, we literally "see" the situation more than we see ourselves
 - Focusing on the _____ causes us to attribute our behavior to it
- When we watch others (or self on a TV screen), we see the person – not the situation
 - Focusing on the _____ causes us to attribute behavior to personality factors
- So, whatever grabs our attention – whatever seems salient to us at the time – that is what we attribute behavior to
- The fact that you can remove actor-observer bias by changing people's focus supports the visual perspective explanation
- But what else might influence actor-observer bias?

Actor-Observer Bias & _____

- Western cultures focus on _____
- Eastern cultures are more _____
- So... do Asians show the actor-observer bias?
- What kinds of attributions do they typically make for self and others? _____

Summary

- Actor-observer bias seems to be caused by these three factors:
 - _____ differences
 - Visual perspective
 - _____ perspective (or values)

Class Demonstration

Self-serving biases

- Many self-serving biases have been identified – we “favor ourselves” in so many ways that it may be the strongest prejudice of all
- To ourselves, we appear to be “heaven sent” (innocent, deserving, and worthy)
- Subjects were asked to estimate the probability that various people would go to heaven, after they died – including themselves
- What were the results - who is most likely to go to heaven? _____

The _____ Ego

- Tony Greenwald views self-serving biases as a sign of this
 - The overpowering force within each of us that oversees how we view the world
- Why? Because the ego acts like a dictator, filtering news to his constituents
 - In this case, the news is coming from yourself, about yourself, and it’s mostly good!
- Greenwald identified 2 types of self-serving biases:
 - Benefectance
 - _____
- Let’s see how each plays a role in “totalitarian ego”

Beneffectance

- **BENEFICIENCE (DOING GOOD)+** _____
- We seem to have a natural tendency to think the best of ourselves:
- The _____ is the cause of good effects (taking credit)
- The _____ is the cause of negative effects (avoiding blame)

In other words

- If the outcome is good, we make _____ attributions for the event
 - Assigning own personality, skill, or effort as the cause
- If the outcome is bad, we make _____ attributions for the event
 - Assigning “outside forces” (luck, chance, circumstances) as the cause

Research Assistant Project

- Research assistants made ratings of their _____ contribution to research projects
 - Sometimes the projects were successful, sometimes they were not
- Beneffectance predicts higher ratings when the projects were (successes or failures)?

Content Analyses (Benefectance)

The Sports Pages Study

- Newspaper quotes from coaches and players who had either won or lost their game were written on index cards
- Judges blind to the win/lose condition coded the quotes as an example of either internal or external attributions

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Attribution Results		
	Won the Game	Lost the Game
Internal	80%	
External	10%	

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- Even though blaming external factors is not considered “good sportsmanship,” coaches and players did so, anyway

Another Example: Explanations for Car Accidents

What’s going on here?

- Benefectance comes from a need to protect our _____
- This is so important we sometimes go to extremes in order to protect ourselves from internal attributions for failure

Self-handicapping

- Do something in advance that could explain away any potential failure
- Literally, “self-handicapping” means to hinder your own performance in advance of a competition or test
- Examples

- Each of these is likely to decrease our performance on the test, which doesn't seem "self-serving" at all – so how does this protect our self-esteem?

Self-handicapping: win/win

- If someone does poorly, circumstances can be blamed
 - “What do you expect? She stayed out all night!”
- But if they do well DESPITE the handicap, they earn bonus points in self-esteem
 - “Wow! She must be really smart – she stayed out all night and still aced the test!”

Egocentrism (Self-centeredness)

- The second part of Greenwald's "totalitarian ego"
- As an example, let's do a demonstration
- Use this space for your answers:

_____ effect

- People recall self-relevant better than non-self-relevant material
- They also better recall material that they generated themselves
- Information related to self has a privileged position in memory
- Why? Things that involve YOU _____

The “Lake Woebegone” effect

- We also tend to view ourselves as “better than average”
- We can't ALL be better than average – who makes up the “average” then?
- But we typically rate ourselves as higher than average in all kinds of positive traits, including intelligence, leadership ability, social skills, and driving ability

Can we ALL be better than average?

- No – it's a statistical impossibility, but nonetheless people _____ themselves that way

FYI: The name “Lake Woebegone” effect comes from Garrison Keillor

_____ Optimism

- Another example of egocentrism
- The tendency to _____-estimate the probability that good things will happen to us
- And to _____-estimate the chance that bad things will happen to us
- People think they are more likely than the _____ person to have good things happen, and less likely to have bad things happen
 - We even overestimate our own life expectancy by an average of 10 years
- We don't do this when we rate others – instead, we use “base rate” information
 - We are better statisticians when we judge others

Class demonstration

- Unrealistic optimism may stem from “illusion of _____”
 - Believing that we have _____
- Games of chance are exactly that – based on chance, but people don't behave as though that's true

Illusion of Control in the Lab

Who bet the most money in the Princeton Dice Game study? _____

Did “control” of the dice actually result in greater success? yes / no

Review so far

- Beneffectance (taking credit/avoiding blame)
 - RA project
 - Content analyses: sports, car accidents
 - Self-handicapping

Egocentrism

- Self-reference effect
- Lake Woebegone effect
- Unrealistic Optimism
- Illusion of Control

Reconstructing History

- Another self-serving bias concerns reconstructing history
- We have a tendency to remember the good things about the past more than the bad things
- But more generally, we remember things about the past that _____ with the present

The Dating Study

- This idea was tested using romantic relationships
- Subjects rated their current dating partner in terms of how “ideal” they thought they were
- 3 months later, they returned to the lab
 - Indicated whether they were still together or had broken up
 - Re-rated their partners

Results

- Let’s look at the data for people who rated their partners LOW at Time 1, but who stayed together
- And for people who rated their partners HIGH at Time 1, but who broke up
- In each case, some adjustments had to be made in their partner’s ratings, right? (and they were, just as you would expect)

Adjustments in memory

- Subjects were also asked to try to remember how they had rated their partners in the past
- This is the interesting data
- As you’ll see, more than partner ratings were adjusted – so were subjects’ memories!

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Partner's "Idealness" (1-15)

	Past Ratings	Present Ratings	Recalled Ratings
Together	3	11	
Apart	10	3	-

Subjects were very inaccurate about their past ratings – if still together, the partner was “always ideal” and if broken up, the partner was “always a loser”

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Reconstructed history is robust

- The “false memory” effect has been shown with health-related behaviors, too
 - People who quit smoking forget how much they used to smoke
 - People who start flossing forget they didn't used to
 - People who have lost weight forget how much they used to eat
- Once we adopt a new lifestyle, or learn how things will turn out for us, we _____ the past so that it fits better with our new belief system

Why?

- Why do we have a hard time remembering things the way they really were? And instead, reconstruct the past to fit the present?
- It allows us the illusion of a stable, solid self
 - It prevents us from realizing how much things (including ourselves) change
 - It gives us a false (but important) sense of security

Positive Illusions

- The news is not all bad, however
- Self-serving biases are also known as “positive illusions” – we seem to have these in spades
- They are good for our _____

They prevent _____

- Coming up with self-serving attributions for success and failure, believing ourselves to be in control (and better than average), and being unrealistically optimistic about our futures are all good for our mental outlook
- Depressed people are less likely to show these biases, and more likely to have a realistic view of themselves, instead
- Depressives do not show:
 - Unrealistic optimism, Lake Woebegon effect, Illusion of control
- This is interesting because “good mental health” is commonly assumed to involve having a “good grip” on reality
- Not so! Those of us with “positive illusions” do much better!

Questions

1. Reconstructing history is a self-serving bias that most resembles:
 - A. The Fundamental Attribution Error
 - B. Self-Handicapping
 - C. Hindsight bias (for the self)
 - D. The Lake Woebegon Effect
2. Sam (a diabetic) forgets to take his insulin before an important job interview. He is most likely engaging in:
 - A. Actor-Observer Bias
 - B. Self-Handicapping
 - C. Egocentrism
 - D. The Lake Woebegon Effect
3. Sarah is convinced she wins at poker most often when she deals. What kind of self-serving bias is this?
 - A. Illusion of control
 - B. Self-reference effect
 - C. Egocentrism
 - D. Self-Handicapping
4. Self-serving biases are...
 - A. Most often seen in depressives
 - B. Grounded in reality
 - C. A sign of good mental health
 - D. Too numerous to have to memorize