

Social Cognition

Introduction

- Why do people behave the way they do in social settings? How do we think about ourselves and others?
 - Need to know how people perceive, process and organize information about others
 - Note – Sometimes hard to study because group studies don't have the same effect on everyone; need to understand the underlying cognitive processes
- We often create our own explanations for behavior and thoughts; not always accurate
 - e.g. Source? I made it up
- Social cognition uses the theories and methods of cognitive psychology and applies those to social psychological phenomena

Impression Formation

- Impression Formation – the process where people combine information about others to make overall judgments
- Why is impression formation important?
 - Helps us navigate social settings
 - Helps us evaluate people who communicate with us
- 2 way; others are also forming impressions of us
- 2 main theories about how we form impressions
- Algebraic (Anderson, 1965) – impressions formed based off a combination of information we know about a person, where each trait is assigned a number

- Summative – add up all traits
- Averaging – average all traits
- Weighted averaging – multiply traits by degree of importance, then average
 - Notably the best match for the impressions people formed
 - Doesn't actually tell us about the actual processes used though
- Configuration (Asch, 1946) – impressions formed with the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts
 - Combine information into an overall impression; not all traits are used in the same way
 - Asch thinks there are 2 main types of characteristics; impression formation very context dependent
 - Central trait – more influential/core
 - Peripheral trait – meaning context sensitive regarding central trait
 - Watch 03 Aschs model of impression formation.mp4

Schemas

- Schemas – cognitive structures that represent our knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus
 - Formed off experience
 - Sort of a mental shortcut; quickly encode, store and retrieve general information about things
- Event Schemas – our generalized representations of activities and events; associated with a particular situation
 - e.g. what one expects in a situation
 - i.e. going to a restaurant, I expect someone to seat me/ask me for my order
- Role Schemas – roles/parts that people are expected to play in a particular setting
 - Usually interlaced with event schemas; roles within events
 - i.e. a chef cooks food, a waiter/ress takes orders
- Person Schemas – individualized knowledge structures about specific types/groups of people, as well as individuals

- Stereotype – a person schema associated with a social category
- Self Schemas – a person schema, for ourselves
 - We manage information regarding ourselves the same way we manage others
 - However, tend to be more complex and have information about future plans

Social Judgment

- People make a lot of errors and have biases when they make their social judgments
- Heuristics – mental shortcuts to make a quick judgment
 - Generally functional; we don't always have time/motivation to think every judgment through in full
 - Sometimes inaccurate because the general rule does not apply to everything
 - Availability Heuristic – judging an events frequency by the ease which they can bring examples of the event to mind
 - i.e. Are there more words that start with r or have r as the third letter? Most would answer the former but the latter is actually true
 - Representative Heuristic – estimating the likelihood that somebody belongs to a group by comparing the features of that person to the prototype for that group
 - Prototype – best example of a category; used to represent what people from a category are like
 - Assuming a prototype is accurate, seems like a sensible rule to follow
 - Can make us insensitive to other useful/unique information

Attribution Theory

- We don't just passively observe the social world; the way we perceive the social world is motivated by a need to predict and control the social environment
 - We want to understand behavior so that we can steer towards positive outcomes and avoid bad ones
 - e.g. grug want to understand human so good thing and no bad thing
- Attribution (Heider) – trying to infer the cause of a behavior and attribute it to either internal or external
 - Internal attribution – attributing ones behavior to them
 - formally, when ones behavior opposes the expectation set by a schema

- e.g. oh that guy is weird because.. he's just weird
- Internal cause – causes that are related to a persons personality, characteristics or dispositional factors
- External attribution – attributing ones behavior to factors outside their control
 - e.g. oh that guy is weird because he's not used to this situation
 - Situational factors – stimuli in the environment, etc
 - We learn people's behavior in different situations, developing schemas associated with context
- Covariation model (Kelly, 1973)– forming attributions with additional information we have when observing multiple behaviors
 - Covariation principle - attributing a behavior to the cause with which it co-varies over time; Kelly thought there were 3 particular types of important information
 - Consensus information – whether others perform the same behavior or not
 - Distinctiveness information – where the behavior is only performed towards a particular target
 - Consistency information – whether the behavior is performed all the time or not
 - Three types of attributions formed with this information
 - Person attribution – attribute the behavior to the person
 - generally made when consensus information is considered low
 - i.e. this person performs the behavior but not other people
 - Target attribution – attribute the behavior to a specific target/stimuli
 - generally made when distinctiveness information is considered high
 - i.e. this person only acts like a creep around this certain person
 - Situational attribution – attribute the behavior to a certain context/situation
 - generally made when consistency information is considered low
 - i.e. this person only acts like this at the nightclub
- How accurate are our attributions? Do we distort our attributions for our own gain?
 - Attributions are not always natural; we have lots of biases
 - Fundamental attribution error/Correspondence bias – the tendency to attribute behavior to their qualities rather than the context/situation
 - Notably culture related; collectivist cultures do this less than individualistic cultures

- Actor-observer bias – the difference in how we think about our own behaviors compared to others
 - We tend to attribute our own behaviors to external factors while others attributed to internal factors
 - Multiple theories why this happens
 - We don't have enough information about others, so it seems high in distinctiveness and low in situational (we have context for our own actions)
 - We focus on them rather than their situation (we don't usually focus on ourselves when we perform behaviors)
 - Actor-observer not quite as simple as this description; seems to be only apparent under a number of certain conditions
 - i.e. when trying to explain positive outcomes, the bias actually flips; we attribute it to ourselves and others to external factors
- Self-serving bias – attributing good outcomes to internal, bad to external
 - i.e. I did well on the exam, I studied well, I did bad on the exam, it was the teacher/hard test/noisy airconditioning
 - Seems to serve 2 purposes
 - Self presentation – make ourselves look better to other people
 - Self-esteem – notably also happens sometimes in private; maybe used to make us feel better about ourselves