

Overview of Social Cognition

January 25th, 2006

Marion Coakley

In October 1983, Marion Coakely was arrested by NYC police officers for the armed robbery and rape of a woman in a Bronx motel. A jury of his peers found him guilty of the rape in 1985, and sentenced to 10 years in jail.

Marion Coakley was born in S.C. in 1955, and moved to NYC in 1979. He had a 2nd grade reading level and an IQ in the 70s (100 is average). He was easygoing. Marion always had trouble finding steady work, so his family in NY helped him find odd jobs. He worked hard when he could find work. He drew no welfare.

After a while, Marion fell in with a group of men from his sister's neighborhood and would hang around with them at night in one of the basements that they had a key to. They lifted weights and drank beer together. They called themselves the Country Boys.

Social Cognition

- n The study of mental processes involved in perceiving, attending to, remembering, thinking about, and making sense of people in our social world.
- n Ross and Nisbett: We see the world not as it is, but as we construct it.

"Hot" and "Cold" Cognition

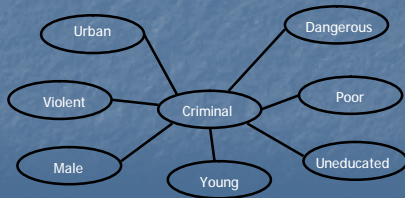
- n "Hot" cognitions are biased, motivated thoughts
 - n Hastorf & Cantril (1954): Dartmouth-Princeton football game. Which team more aggressive?
- n "Cold" cognitions: errors in logic that are by-product of how our mind works
 - n Not motivated, not biased, just human.

Schemata

- n Mental structures used for organizing information

Criminal Schema

- n Mental structures used for organizing information



Schemata

- Mental structures used for organizing information
- Allows for simple processing of constant flow of information
 - What if you had to process everything anew at each encounter?
 - What's this odd structure with 4 posts to the floor, with two planes, one parallel with and one perpendicular to the earth? What would one possibly DO with such a structure?

It's a chair!



Put your butt in the seat!

Schemata

- Implicit Personality Theory: inferring unknown from known traits
 - Kelley, 1950: "Warm v. Cold" Guest Lecturer
 - "a very warm (cold) person, industrious, critical, practical and determined"
 - How Cocky was he?
 - Easily determined, no difference by group
 - How funny?
 - "warm" students saw lecturer as funnier

We go with what we know!

Quick Quiz

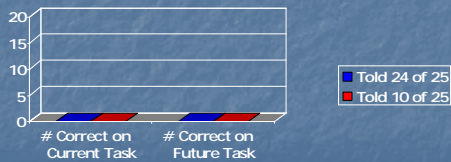
- n How many run-ins with the NYC Police had Marion had in the four years he lived in NY before he was arrested?
- n True or false: Marion was fairly lazy and never took to "regular" work.

The trouble with Schemata

- n Schemata need not be accurate, nor fitting for the situation.
 - n What if you have biased representations of a group?
 - n What if you incorrectly assign someone to a group?
- n Imputing from schemata
 - n Marion had never been in trouble, but we think of criminals as recidivists
- n Forgetting schema-inconsistent information
 - n Did you remember that Marion was a hard worker? How do you picture most criminals?

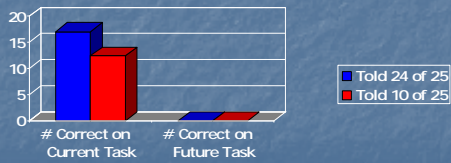
The Trouble with Schemata

- n Persistence effect
 - n Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975, suicide notes.



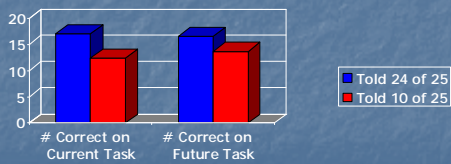
The Trouble with Schemata

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The Trouble with Schemata

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Schema Application

- When are schemata accessible for use?
 - Chronic accessibility
 - Ever see a police show? Cops and Robbers film?
 - Schema is ALWAYS active and ready for use
 - What's a woman like? How about a cop? Teacher?
 - Priming
 - Schema isn't always accessible, but something you were just doing made it so.
 - Where are trials held? Anything influential there?

It's not all Schematic Processing

- n When we have the *motivation* and *resources* to think carefully and critically about something, we will.
- n Even during *systematic* processing, we run into trouble.

What Happened Here?



Why did the driver hit the tree?

- n Fritz Heider, 1958
 - n Internal/Dispositional Attribution:
 - n Behavior determined by something inherent to the **actor** (e.g., personality, genetics, etc.)
 - n External/Situational Attribution:
 - n Behavior determined by something inherent in the **actor's environment**

What Happened Here?

m Internal Attributions

m External Attributions



Situational v. Dispositional Attributions

m Fundamental Attribution Error

n We tend to make internal attributions, to the exclusion of situational concerns.

n We assume that people's personality drives their behavior. Nice people do nice things, mean people act cruelly.

n aka "correspondence bias"

Scotland: February 2001

First, since the late 1980s, the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a launching point from which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.

If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it.

The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post, even though all its rulers are against their territories being used to that end. But they are helpless and cannot fight America's will. Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded 1 million... despite all this, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation. So here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors.

Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve Israeli interests and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there.

The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of their occupation of the Peninsula

How supportive is the author of bin Laden's argument?

Fundamental Attribution Error

- n Jones & Harris, 1967: Castro essays
 - n Told to read a pro- or anti-Castro essay written by an anonymous student.
 - n Anonymous student either assigned to a side or chose which side to defend
 - n DV: How much do you think anonymous student supports Fidel Castro?

FAE: Jones & Harris, 1967

	Chose Side	Assigned Side
Anti-Castro		
Pro-Castro		

- n DV: Pro-Castro attitude, measured 10 - 70
- n What SHOULD results look like?

FAE: Jones & Harris, 1967

	Chose Side	Assigned Side
Anti-Castro	17.38	
Pro-Castro	59.62	

- n DV: Pro-Castro attitude, measured 10 – 70
- n Pro-Castro is non-normative: if you *choose* it, you probably believe it.
- n What should “assigned” group look like?

FAE: Jones & Harris, 1967

	Chose Side	Assigned Side
Anti-Castro	17.38	22.87
Pro-Castro	59.62	44.10

- n DV: Pro-Castro attitude, measured 10 - 70
- n Assigned should show *no difference* by argument
 - n If it's assigned, how can you infer person's attitude?

A Simple Twist

- n Actor-Observer Difference
 - n Explain the car accident we saw earlier...
 - n ...if the driver was some little old lady.
 - n ...if you were driving.
 - n When good things happen to us, we're happy to take credit. We discount others' role in their success
 - n When bad things happen to us it's never our fault, but we're more than happy to pin the blame on others for their failures.
 - n How'd you pull an A?
 - n I'm a freakin' genius!
 - n How come you got a C- in Psych and Law?
 - n Brad's a jerk, that's why!

What's your point?

- People tend to make dispositional attributions, even if they should know better
- People tend to blame others and absolve themselves *for the same failing*.

How might this play out at trial?

What happens when you throw in the use of a schema that tells us criminals are bad, evil people?

Ichheiser, 1943

"We interpret in our everyday life the behavior of individuals in terms of specific personal qualities rather than in terms of specific situations. Our whole framework of concepts of 'merit' and 'blame', 'success' and 'failure', 'responsibility' and 'irresponsibility', as accepted in everyday life, is based on the presupposition of personal determination of behavior."

Is it hopeless? Limits on attributional shortcomings

- Culture
- Goals
 - Accountability
 - Outcome dependency
- Overshooting
 - Shifted attention
 - Suppression

Broad Cultural Typology (I-C)

- Individualistic cultures
 - Independent Self
 - Supremacy of personal goals
 - Personal attitudes
 - Self-reliance and competition
 - Individual as agentic, reliance on traits
- Collectivist cultures
 - Interdependent Self
 - Supremacy of group goals
 - Social norms
 - Sociability
 - More attuned to social roles as causal, less reliance on disposition?

Culture and Attribution

- Morris & Peng, 1994
 - US and Chinese participants (I-C)
 - Examine causal explanation for physical and social stimuli (billiard balls and people)
 - Results
 - Physical: no differences by culture
 - Social: Chinese students relied more heavily on situational (compared to dispositional) attributions to explain social behavior (e.g., a murder).

I-C distinction not 100% pure

- Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999
 - Korean and American students replicate Jones & Harris (1967) classic FAE study
 - Both groups rely on dispositional attribution
 - What happens when participant forced to write counter-attitudinal essay *before* making FAE judgment?
 - No change for American students
 - Korean students pick up on situational cues and *almost never* make dispositional attributions
 - When situational cues NOT salient, fall back on dispositions
 - Anchoring and adjusting?

Goals and Attribution

- n Accountability
 - n Members of individualistic cultures pay too little attention to environmental agency.
 - n What if they tried harder?
 - n Tetlock, 1985: Publicly account for impression
 - n Jones and Harris (1967) paradigm
 - n Results
 - n Those not told they'd be accountable show usual pattern.
 - n Those held accountable did not show correspondence bias in forced choice condition.
 - n Conclusion: When motivated, Ps can be sufficiently discriminating to pick up the cue

Goals and Attribution

- n Outcome dependency
 - n What if securing a reward depended on how you *and a partner* performed in the Jones & Harris study?
 - n Vonk, 1999: Should lead to greater attention to everything potentially relevant in person-situation field.
 - n Vonk 1999: J & H 1967 paradigm
 - n When outcome dependent, "no choice" participants were thought to be less supportive of position than "full choice" participants. No difference when not outcome dependent.

Overshooting

- n Shifted Attention
 - n What if your goal is to learn something about the *situation* instead of the *person*?
 - n Krull & Dill, 1996
 - n Goal prevents trait inference
 - n Given the right motivation, the effect reverses!
 - n People over-attribute causal influence to the situation

Overshooting

- n Suppression
 - n Don't think of a white elephant...
 - n Ok, now try not to attribute events to actors' dispositions
 - n Works in the short run! (Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998)
 - n Over time, the process becomes ironic
 - n The more you try suppress internal attributions, the harder they push themselves into consciousness
 - n Yzerbet, Cornelle, Dumont, & Hahn (2001)
 - n Rebound occurs when you try to monitor thoughts. Just taking the situation into account won't make this happen.

Closing Thoughts

- n For every problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.
- H. L. Mencken
- n The line between Good and Evil lies in the center of every human heart
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn
