The Self, Pt. 2

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Purdue University
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The Totalitarian Ego

• Inspired by:

• George Orwell’s 1984 describes a totalitarian society.

• The protagonist is Winston Smith, whose job it is to rewrite history to be consistent with his government’s current policy.
Three Cognitive Biases

• Totalitarian mechanisms for the organization of knowledge
  – Egocentricity
  – Beneffectance
  – Cognitive conservatism
Egocentricity

• Self perceived as more central to events than it is.
  – Memory revolves around self
    • Events are encoded and recorded such that self is remembered as a leading player in the past (sort of like Forrest Gump).
    • Self is perceived as the axis of cause and effect.
Beneffectance

• Self is selectively perceived as being responsible for desired, but not undesired, outcomes.
  – Taking responsibility for successes.
    • Dispositional attributions
  – Denial of responsibility of harming.
    • Situational attributions.
  – In group tasks, self is perceived as contributing more to the group’s success, but less if the group fails.
  – Vicarious beneffectance:
    • Higher group identification when one’s group is successful; lower when it is unsuccessful (BIRGing; Cialdini et al, 1976).
Cognitive Conservatism

• Resistance to cognitive change
  – Assimilation
    • Fitting new information into old schema’s
  – Confirmation bias
    • Search for information that confirms preconceptions.

1 5 13 17 25 29 .....???
Selective Attention

• Seeing and hearing what we expect to see and hear.
• Power of first impressions
Expectancy Confirmation

A
BIRD
IN THE
THE HAND
Expectancy Confirmation

Count the Fs:

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULTS OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF YEARS.
Selective Memory

• Greenberg, Williams, & O’Brien
  – Harsh to lenient order
  – Lenient to harsh order
Self-fulfilling Prophecy

• Evoking expected responses in others
  – Snyder, Tanke, Berscheid
  – Snyder & Swann
When We Do Change

• We re-write history
  – Leading questions
    • Crash vs. Hit
    • Did you see:
      – Any broken glass?
      – The broken glass?
When We Do Change, We Think We Didn’t

- I-knew-it-all-along
  - Perception that we did not, in fact, change.

- I’ve always felt this way
  - After attitudes have been changed as the result of an experimental manipulation.
Are These Biases Functional?

- Inspires confidence
- Maintains self-esteem
- Encourages persistence and not giving up.
- Depressed individuals less likely to show evidence of cognitive biases.
- But, if extreme, they can be dysfunctional…