psyc3122 lecture 12

Schema change and use; Affect and social cognition a.k.a. The quest for happiness

next week: Revision and discussion of the exam

Today
- Review of last week
- Affective forecasting
- Seligman’s explanatory styles
- Perceptions of control
- Implications of accessibility research
Stereotypes about self and others

- **Schemas**: Pre-existing knowledge structures which guide perception, attention, encoding, judgement, and memory
- **Scripts**: Schemas about behavioural sequences (getting married, going to a restaurant)
- **Stereotypes**: Schemas about social groups

Schemas form about others, about relationships, and about the self

- They direct attention, encoding, evaluation, elaboration, and recall
  - This allows for quick decisions that will be consistent with the schema
  - It also inhibits the recognition, impact and recall of differences and change
  - It creates self-fulfilling prophecies for self, others, and whole groups

Stereotype effects

- Negatively stereotyped groups are evaluated more harshly under ambiguity;
- More errors are made at their expense and fewer errors are made in their favour;
- Judged independently, individuals may benefit from the low standard of ability applied to their group (shifting standards research)
- Judged relative to members of more favourably stereotyped groups, disadvantaged groups’ weaknesses are augmented and their achievements are discounted
- For minority groups, illusory correlations ensure that given equally rare negative behaviours in both groups, minorities are evaluated more negatively
- The cognitive miser research presents stereotypes as the main cause of prejudice and argues we stereotype to save mental energy whereas we should try to process information attribute-by-attribute to be unbiased
- But attribute-by-attribute processing will still be vulnerable to group biases
Affect and social cognition

- We have explored the effect of mood on information processing and attitudes
- I want to turn now to longer-term affect – the social cognition of happiness

Happiness

- It feels good
- It’s associated with creativity, sociability, energy, engagement in community affairs (Lyubomirsky et al., 2000)
- Happy people live longer (!)
Affective forecasting

- We learned earlier about Wilson’s important work on rumination and inexperience
  - Inexperience + Deliberation → Poor decision
- The work of Dan Gilbert on affective forecasting also has important messages for our decisions
  - Basic point: People predict their own emotions poorly
    - **Durability bias**: People think happy events (e.g., winning the lottery) will make them happy for longer than they do (Gilbert et al., 1998) and that sad events (e.g., death of a partner/child, disablement) will make them sad for longer than they do
    - **Focusing illusion** (Schkade and Kahneman, 1997): People disregard aversive correlates of imagined positive events (e.g., becoming rock star ↔ loss of friends, disrupted home)
    - **Immune neglect**: ‘mental immune system’ buffers against stress through positive illusions, rationalisations, etc. and this works at non-conscious level so people don’t take into account it will happen when imagining how they will react to sad or happy events (Gilbert et al., 1998)
Happiness of recent accident victims (paraplegic or quadriplegic) vs. recent lottery winners vs controls

Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman (1978)

It’s no big deal .... (Gilbert et al., 1998)

- Assistant profs thought they would be happier for 5 years if got tenure compared to if failed to get tenure
  - but no difference
- People imagined they would feel bad chronically if rejected for a job regardless of whether panel was an indiv or skilled team
  - in reality felt better over time
  - esp if panel was an indiv
  - immune neglect – couldn’t predict ease of rationalisations
- This line of work to me supports a zen-like philosophy – regardless of what happens, you probably won’t feel great or crappy for long!
It’s not financial security?

- Most people believe they will be happier when they are wealthy.
- After food, shelter and safety needs are met, money is not associated with happiness (Diener et al.)
  - neither prospectively nor cross-sectionally
  - neither at an individual nor at a group level

Why not be happy if you’re a millionaire?

- People get accustomed to extreme events (Brickman & Campbell, 1971)
- Other mundane events occur which impact on happiness because they are immediate — e.g., fortunes of love, sports (Wilson et al., 2000)
- Part of happiness is a personality / heritable component (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996)
- Social comparison means people lift or lower their expectations based on peer group (e.g., Hagerty, 2000)
- Events become anchors against which new events are compared - lottery winners find ordinary events bring less joy; victims of misfortune find joy in what they previously took for granted (e.g., Smith, Diener, & Wedell, 1989)
People take different roads seeking fulfillment and happiness. Just because they're not on your road doesn't mean they've gotten lost. ~H. Jackson Browne

Set points and adaptation

![Graphs showing life satisfaction trajectories](image.png)

Fig. 1. Average within-person trajectories for life satisfaction before and after various changes. Panel A shows reactions and adaptation to marriage, death, divorce, and Edwards. Panel B shows reactions and adaptation to unemployment and the onset of various degrees of disability. Adopted from Lucas (2001), Lucas et al. (2008), Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2003), and Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2006).

From Lucas (2007) in Current Directions in Psychological Science
And it depends on:

- Resilience
  - “Bouncing back” from stress
  - Even to the point of achieving a higher baseline happiness than that achieved before the stressor/trauma (!)
  - Being energized and inspired in the face of difficulties

Resilience is promoted by:
- Exposure to adversity
- Deliberate focus on positive mental states
- Self-efficacy
- Optimism
- Age !

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Age and Affect
Mroczek & Kolarz (1998) JPSP

Old people are more positive (exponentially – age²)

Controls: men, educated folk, married folk, those with less work life & health stress

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Figure 2: Plotted regression line between age and positive affect. Positive affect scores range from 0 to 30. The regression line is based on the following equation: positive affect = 22.69 + age (-14) + age² (-.02)

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Age and Affect
Mroczek & Kolarz (1998) JPSP

- Old people are less negative (linearly - age)
- Controlling for everything else as before

And what about before 25?
Twin study from 17 to 24 suggests:

- Stability coeffs for various life satisfaction scales .55 to .66
- People became less negative – lower aggression, alienation, stress
- People became more positive (> well being)
- More social closeness
- Higher control motives, more motivated by & enjoying work achievement
- More ‘harm avoidance’ (less risk)

Bronigen, Carlson, Hicks, Krueger, & Iacono (2008)
Growing up

- people think most people become less happy as they age, when it’s the reverse
  - People tend to become happier over time
  - Cross-sectionally age has been found to be the most significant predictor of happiness (e.g., Horley & Lavery, 2005)
- “Not only do younger people believe that older people are less happy, but older people believe they and others must have been happier ‘back then’. Neither belief is accurate.” (Lacey et al., 2006)
  - Older people have better “mental immune systems” (Gilbert) – appreciate positive and discount / contextualize negative
  - Older people have more control over their lives, in general
  - Older people have more long-term relationships
  - Older people give more to others

What you can do - Happy life choices (behaviour)

- Alcohol, sugar, sex, TV …
- Comedy and laughter …
- Music, drawing, creative arts …
- Eating healthy diet;
- Exercising;
- Appropriate amount of sleep;
- Pursuing and sustaining close relationships over time;
- Involved in community activities, e.g. volunteering, activism, religion
- Meaningful skill, work or hobby
- Owning a pet
- Planting a garden
What you can think – Believe in optimism

- Seligman’s (1975, 1991) explanatory styles
  - Good things are stable, they are global (vs. specific), they are caused by you (internal locus of control)
  - But also LT stability for many. Depression is correlated with pessimistic explanatory style including prospective longitudinal studies (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1992)

- Leads to interventions aimed at:
  - training people to identify stable global internal negative thoughts
  - to find evidence against these attributions (find unstable, specific, and external sources for negative events)
  - to develop new self-affirming explanations
  - which repeatedly rehearse to promote automaticity

Control not denial

- Langer and Rodin (1976) control intervention
  - nursing home patients given a choice of meals, room arrangements, films, plants to care for -> half mortality rate 18 months later compared to people given everything incl. plant w/out choice or responsibility

- Seligman (1975) learned helplessness
  - Dogs given inescapable shocks later passive w/ escapable
  - Despair, apathy based on learning that “nothing makes a difference” – intervention must be based on helping people identify and pursue mastery / control
  - Not denial (e.g., of anger, fear, grief) – white bear effect!
  - Contextualisation -> impermanence, specificity, externality
  - external attribution for bad things are psychologically functional but internal locus of control is more important – psychologically better to be guilty than depressed (in short term) :)
  - So focus must be on decreasing pervasive, permanent, personalized attributions
Belief change <-> Environmental change

- Environmental factors promote certain beliefs (e.g., life insurance salespeople - constant rejection -> 80% attrition over 4 years)
  Seligman, 1991
  - Pessimistic beliefs can be learned – likewise optimistic
- Can also strategically rehearse positivity though
  - clear attribution undermines mood effect
  - But counting your blessings increases happiness prospectively (Eamon & McCullough, 2003)

Humor training

- Humor as an intellectual skill
  - ‘Seeing the funny side’
  - Emotional distance from ‘bothersome issues’
  - Relaxation + experience of pleasure
  - McGhee “Laughter Remedy” -> > cheerfulness, contentment with life 2 months later
  - Teaching Ps to be more cheerful -> > mood and lower blood pressure 2 days later (Papousek & Schulter, 2008)
  - Elderly patients given meds + humor training were more satisfied with their life than those given meds alone (Walter et al., 2007)
- Laughter is physiologically relaxing
- Humor & laughter increase pain tolerance and reduce anxiety (e.g., Ruch et al., 2004)
- Humor and laughter are socially attractive so have indirect benefits by increasing relationships/support
Humour as social—esp when joker and listener share suffering

During the Holocaust, humor served three main functions. First was its **critical function**: humor focused attention on what was wrong and sparked resistance to it. Second was its **cohesive function**: it created solidarity in those laughing together at the oppressors. And third was its **coping function**: it helped the oppressed get through their suffering without going insane.

Some of the jokes wore their hostility on their face, but many were more subtle, like the story of the Jewish father teaching his son how to say grace before meals.

"Today in Germany the proper form of grace is "Thank God and Hitler.""
"But suppose the Führer dies?" asked the boy.
"Then you just thank God."

John Morreall
http://www.holocaust-trc.org/holocaust_humor.htm

“Count your blessings”

- Counting your blessings increases happiness prospectively (Eamon & McCullough, 2003)
- **Accessibility** (Bruner, 1957):
  - Rehearsal increases accessibility of thoughts / emotions
    - Less input is required for activation
    - Wider range of inputs ‘accepted’ as fitting into category
    - More likely that other categories that might also fit data are ‘masked’
      - E.g., downward vs. upward social comparison
- **Rehearsal of positive schemas**
  - Increases likelihood of positive thoughts / emo
  - Increases weighting of positive events and attributes in judgement (incl. self and others)
  - Increases positive judgement of ambiguity
  - Facilitates discounting of negative emotions / events
Framing your meta-depression

Option A
- The banality of these cognitive choices appalls and annoys me
- Too ego-depleted to pursue alienating positive thinking exercises
- Depression as functional in hostile envt – change envt before seek to abandon depressive realism

Option B
- Depression as a mental state is treatable – when you have energy, consider exercise, therapy, journalling, tv, etc.!
- Resilience is only available to those who encounter adversity

Summary: The pursuit of happiness
- Happiness – it’s not what you think it is
  - Affective forecasting
  - Wealth & disaster research
- It’s how you think *
  - Seligman’s explanatory styles
  - Perceptions of control
  - Implications of accessibility research
* With the caveat that how you think depends partly on how your environment is structured
- Happiness comes from
  - Alcohol, sugar, funny movies, etc.!
  - Physical exercise, diet, and sleep
  - Mastery (achieving personally important knowledge & skills)
  - Creativity (music, arts, writing...)
  - Relationships with living things (plants, pets, people; Nature)
  - Engaging with others (volunteering / activism / religion)
  - Long term projects (gardens, long term partnerships)
  - "Counting your blessings" / learned focus on positive control
Next week: **Revision + the Exam**
   – Reading: none

In the **tutes** this week:
   – Optional consult