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PSYC 210: Social Psychology

Homework Assignment #1

Current Directions Article #1: **The Automaticity of Social Life**

Authors: John A. Bargh and Erin L. Williams

1. Define automaticity and explain how it is related to social perception.

Automaticity is control of one’s internal psychological processes by external stimuli and events in one’s immediate environment, often without knowing or awareness of such control. Automaticity is closely associated with social perception by focusing on the extent of which people’s impressions of others are influenced by automatic biases. Automaticity roots from the accessibility of social behavior representations, or trait constructs, such as those one has frequently used in the past (chronic accessibility) or has recently used in some unrelated content (priming). Early automatic research using priming methods has shown that several trait constructs are automatically activated by perceptions of environmental features, such as group stereotypes can be automatically formed by perception of traits of a person’s age, gender and race. In short, one’s automatic reactions to certain individuals or groups can be triggered by mere perceptions of them.

2. Clarify how the concept of automaticity has been applied to the social spheres of close relationships, situational features, and social structure.

Close relationships: The significant others’ imagined presence in one’s life can become external automatic triggers for one’s nonconscious goal pursuits. Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) found that bringing people temporary access to images of their close others can cause them to behave according to the goals stored within these images, for example, people were more likely take the time to help the experimenter when asked about their friends than when asked about their colleagues.

Situational features: Social norms of conduct are automatically activated in regular settings and social situations. Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) found that priming the image of a library to participants then telling them to go to the library led to their talking more softly than those who are not primed prior to going to the library.

Social structure: The concept of social structure, or power, are generally more automatically activated and correlated with advancing one’s own goals than others’ outcomes. However, Chen, Lee-Chai and Bargh (2001) found that people who have a sense of community automatically help other people and are less self-centered when they are primed with power.

3. The authors present research involving automaticity and motivated cognition. By defining each, explaining why these two concepts are seemingly at odds with each other. Then, explain how the authors integrate them.

Automaticity refers to one’s response and behavior is automatically activated by external environmental trigger which is out of our control or awareness, while motivated cognition involves the influence of our own internal motives in our thinking process and behavior. The authors integrated the two seemingly different concepts together by explaining motivated cognition is automatic and nonconscious, and that multiple motivated cognitive events can occur at the same time under certain circumstances and one can counter the other. Moskowitz, Gollwitzer, Wasel, and Schalal (1999) showed that automatic stereotyping tendencies to protect one’s self-esteem (motivated cognition) can happen at the same time as and be countered by the automatic desire to be egalitarian, resulting in a positive motivated cognition.

4. An explanation of how you can apply this research to your life.

I think that this research showed that influencing people’s behavior by priming them with external stimuli can be effective. Thus, priming them with positive external stimuli would be useful in making people do what we want them to do, such as advertisement companies can present the idea of their friends would do a certain desired activity in terms of an advertisement to get people to do the exact same thing. Moreover, this research helps me be more mindful of automatic motivated cognition and serves as a reminder for me not to stereotype a group of people based on one person’s behaviors. It also showed me which type of person would be a potentially good leader who would care for other people and not only oneself, so that I can make a good decision on the type of leader I want to follow, or on the type of leader I want to be.