Huong Phan

PSYC 210: Social Psychology

Homework Assignment #1

Current Directions Article #2: **The Spotlight Effect and the Illusion of Transparency: Egocentric Assessments of How We Are Seen by Others**

Authors: Thomas Gilovich, Kenneth Savitsky

1. This line of research focuses on our egocentric bias in judging how others see us. Explain how both the spotlight effect and the illusion of transparency illustrates the egocentric bias.

The spotlight effect refers to the people’s propensity to overestimate the extent to which their looks and behaviors are noticed or judged by other people. In a study, participants were told to wear a T-shirt with a picture of Barry Manilow, a figure of questionable reputation to college students, and go to a room with 4-6 other people. The result was that the participants significantly overestimated the number of people who actually took notice of the T-shirt. The effect is also observed as people overestimated the extent to which others paid attention to their influence in group discussions, or their own absence. Researchers showed that people experienced the spotlight effect because they found it hard to overcome their own subjective perception of the experience, even though they know other people tend to pay less attention to them than themselves. This is evidenced by a study in which some participants were asked to get used to wearing an embarrassing shirt, as opposed to others who were not. As the participants who were used to wearing their embarrassing shirt tend to get more distracted from the shirt than those who were not, their estimation of the number of people who noticed their shirt decreased as their own focus on the shirt became less acute.

The illusion of transparency refers to people’s propensity to overestimate the extent to which their internal states are noticed by other people. For example, in a study which people are told to hide their disgust over a pungent-smell drink and estimate how many people would guess correctly the pungent-smell drink, they overestimated the accuracy of observers in correctly identifying the drink. It was also shown that people think their lies are more easily detected than they actually would, people’s worry in emergency situations are more obvious than it is and negotiators think their preferences are more apparent to their partners than they actually are.

Therefore, both of these effects illustrates the egocentric bias as they show people usually depend on their opinions of themselves to interpret others’ opinions of them.

2. The authors claim that the spotlight effect holds both positive and negative occurrences. Explain this claim and describe some research evidence that supports it.

Positive: If we think people pay attention to our looks and behaviors more than they actually do, we would pay more attention in improving our appearances and behave more smartly to make a good impression on others. This in turn makes us more likeable in the eyes of others. Moreover, since others do not take notice of our outward appearances and behaviors as much as we think they do, for example, we can focus on being ourselves and expressing our individuality without fear of being judged all the time.

Negative: The spotlight effect leads us to think others will judge us more poorly than they really will when we dine alone or wear an embarrassing T-shirt. This may make us more stressed out about our appearances and actions than we really should. Especially, there is research evidence that we blame ourselves for our failures than we expect others to, which means it can make us feel bad about ourselves unnecessarily.

3. Explain how the anchoring and adjustment heuristic relates to the spotlight effect. Reflect on at least one other heuristic that might be at work in either the spotlight effect or the illusion of transparency.

Since people are fixated on their initial perception of others’ opinions of them (anchoring heuristic), even when they become aware that others do not take as much notice in them as they do for themselves and need to adjust their perception of how they appear to others (adjustment heuristic), but they are still unable to overcome their own initial opinions. For example, people tend to criticize themselves more when they fail at doing something than they expect others to do. Even though they later know that their own judgment of themselves is more serious than others’ judgment of them, they are unable to adjust their judgment much. Another heuristic that comes into play in this is people’s inability to expect others to show sympathy with their failures because they have experienced the same failures themselves. We don't take into account that others may have done the same thing that we are doing before like wearing an embarrassing shirt or eating alone and thus are able to empathize with us and not pass their judgments easily on us.

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

Since others don’t pay attention to me as much as I think they do, that means I can be less conscious and worried about how I look to others but focus on doing what I want and like to do, like sitting alone in cafeteria when I want to, wearing clothes I like and expressing my opinions without thinking of how other people may judge. If any of my friend are also stressing out because of their spotlight effect, I would also tell them to chill out and enjoy life as they want to without caring too much about others’ opinions, as everybody is also doing their own thing and does not take much notice of other people’s behaviors.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Current Directions Article #3: **Relationships, Human Behavior, and Psychological Science**

Authors: Harry T. Reis, W. Andrew Collins

1. Describe some of the positive outcomes associated with having relationships. How might evolution explain these associations?

Having healthy relationships can lead to decreased mortality rates, faster recovery from coronary artery bypass surgery, better performance of the immune system, better responses to stress and psychiatric disturbance, and increased quality of life.

It has been proposed that cooperative living has become a fundamental survival strategy for early humans to protect themselves from the jeopardy of natural environment. Over time, our minds have undergone evolution in developing several mechanisms through forming diverse and interconnected social relationships within our collective society.

2. Describe the effects of relationship contexts for each of the following areas of research: social cognition, emotion, and development. How does an understanding of relationship contexts advance the knowledge in each of these areas?

Social cognition: Relationship context affects social cognition in the presence of a close partner. Self-serving attributional bias, in which people makes more internal attributions for their success and more external attributions for their failures compared to those for strangers, does not apply in contexts in which the self is compared with close relationship partners. Self-referential effect, in which our ability to remember a piece of information when it is identified with the self can be improved, is also weaker when we have a closer relationship with the other person. Close relationships operate on an interdependent level of reference and involve more interconnections than distant relationships do. This is evidenced by the extent of overlap between brain region for hearing one’s own name and hearing the name of a close friend is greater than that between brain region for hearing one’s own name and hearing the name of a familiar (but not close) friend. Relationship context also affects social cognition in the absence of the close partner. A study showed that images of a beloved figure from one’s past may influence one’s interpretations, memories, judgments and feelings about a new acquaintance that looks like the person from the past. Thus, the understanding of relationship contexts results in an advance of knowledge in social cognition as it illustrates the activation of certain social cognitive processes, and the effects of these processes rely heavily on the nature of relationship between the self and the significant others.

Emotion: Relationship context affects emotion as certain emotions, such as jealousy or romantic love are only driven by relationships. The possibility, intensity and nature of expression of other emotions are also driven by the interpersonal relationship with the target of emotion. This is because emotion is our response to external events that are of significance meaning to us, and different relationships signify a difference in importance to our personal well-being. The intensity of emotions depends on the closeness of the relationships. Berscheid and Ammazzalorso (2001) found that the more interdependent the two people are, the stronger expectations they have of each other, leading to more intense emotions they experience. Other studies also found that people’s willingness to express emotions increases with the extent of closeness, trust and collectivity a relationship has. Emotion suppression may happen if the emotion display is harmful to the relationships. People are more likely to show empathy for their close partners’ hardship, better understand each other’s emotions and share their emotions with each other through several emotional process. Because of these numerous links between relationship contexts and emotions, understanding of relationship contexts help advance the knowledge in emotion.

Development: As newborns, we form various inherent relationship mechanisms such as attachment to our caregivers. Infants clearly orient towards their caregivers, and caregivers in turn are attentive infants’ emotions. The significance of early relationships can be seen through infants’ tendency to look for their caregivers for comfort in potentially intimidating situations. Early relationships can also affect their development of important activities in their entire lives like relating to other people or caring about others. It is evident that there is usually continuity between early relationships and relationships in different points of life, while discontinuities sometimes happen because of unhappy early relationships that disturb normal development. It has also been suggested early relationships serve as the foundation for expectations about social relations. Thus, understanding of relationships are important in advancing the knowledge in human development since relationships are positively associated with almost all aspects of activities that humans engage in in the course of their whole life such as school, work or parenthood and all aspects of our well-beings.

3. The central idea of this idea of this article is the importance of considering relationship contexts in psychological science, yet the authors never explicitly define this term. What does the term “relationship context” mean to you? Use specific information from the article to support your point.

The article defined relationships as the characteristics that describe the involved parties’ interdependence with each other, and the manner in which individuals alter their behavior in order to coordinate with others’ actions and preferences. It also mentioned various research studies that showed the more intimate relationships are, our social cognition processes, emotions and developments are affected. Thus, to me, understanding relationship context is understanding the extent of closeness of different people that we interact with everyday to us that affects our own behavior and various psychological processes.

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

Now that I know that relationships can largely affect how I think, feel and behave, I want to develop even stronger bonds with my friends and families. This will help me experience less self-serving attributional bias, meaning I will become more objective at attributing failures and successes to whether internal state or external situations and not always blame my environment for my failures. Thus, I will be more motivated to improve my own ability to succeed. The research also reflects how the relationships I have formed since I was here in Earlham have made me more comfortable in expressing my opinions and emotions, and also have become motivations in my daily life.