



## **SW 500 Human Differences, Social Relationships, Well-Being, and Change through the Life Course**

**Professor Daphna Oyserman**

**Mondays 9-12**

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**General Overview (for all SW 500 classes):** This course will employ multicultural and critical perspectives to understand individuals, families, and their interpersonal and group relationships, life span development, and theories of well-being, stress, coping, and adaptation. This course will emphasize knowledge about individuals and small social systems and the implications of this knowledge for all domains of social work practice. Students will be introduced to the concepts of risk and protective factors, with relevant examples at the individual and small system levels. Students will also consider the implications of this knowledge for intervening in social problems and supporting rehabilitation once problems have developed. Major components of the course will be concerned with the processes of oppression, privilege, and discrimination and factors that help people and small social systems to change. The knowledge presented will include the interrelationships between smaller and larger social systems, and in particular, how biological factors and the larger social and physical environments shape and influence individual and family well-being.

**Contact:** My email is [daphna@umich.edu](mailto:daphna@umich.edu); my office phone is 647-7622.

**Office hours:** Mondays after class, 12:30-1:30 and Tuesdays after class, 5:15-6:15. I can also be reached at my office (telephone number is 647-7622) at ISR (you can leave a message if I am not in when you call).

**Other lecture series:** As a graduate student at UM, there are many opportunities for you to attend lecture series to extend your learning outside the classroom. I attend regular series that may be of interest. The first is The Group Dynamics Seminar on Mondays from 3:30 – 5:00 at the Institute for Social Research (426 Thompson, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, large conference room). This semester, the weekly talks are about the malleability of intelligence, the focus will be on the impact of various policy changes in the U.S., as well as on cultural and contextual factors that can make a large difference, with perspectives from various disciplines. An updated listing of the topic is available at

<http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/seminars/index.htm>. This is highly relevant to the PODS focus and anyone interested is welcome to attend.

On Wednesdays I also attend the brown bag talk series in the Social Psychology Department from 12-1 (every other week, I miss this because I have faculty meetings (12-2) here at the School of Social Work). No schedule is currently published but I'll announce in class if the weekly topic looks relevant to our class or PODS and will also announce other talks as they come up in the semester that are relevant, though of course these are not required additions to the class.

**Assignments, grading and structure of the class:** Participation 25%, Brief Paper 25%, Quiz 1 25%, Quiz 2 25%.

*Participation* Typically each week we'll have 4-person small group discussion, then full-class discussion of the readings, followed by a lecture on the topic for the following week to set up the readings (lectures will be posted on the class web page). Each week there will be *core* readings, and for those with particular interest in the area, further suggested readings. Each week, the *core concepts* that you should understand will be highlighted as will relevant issues and implications. These will form the basis of the weekly discussion. The goal of the discussions is to create an active learning context in which each week's content is actively linked to prior content so that by the end of the semester, students will have a linked memory structure, facilitating later recall and use of the material in class and in the field.

*Brief paper* To facilitate active learning, there is a short writing assignment early in the semester (and two content-based quizzes described below). The writing assignment is a 4-page Personal Reflection piece (you may need to edit your writing to not go over the page limit). Focus is on personal experience of development in social context – your experience of meaning being made in social context, through relationships with others, and how this influenced your experience of an important life task (e.g., school, friendships, or close relationships). You can focus on your own experience or that of someone you know well. The goal of the paper is to begin to consider the topics that will be raised in the semester, to highlight their relevance to you, prior to undertaking academic study on the topic.

*Quizzes* This is a foundation course, which means that the knowledge learned is meant to be building blocks for more advanced coursework later in your MSW career. Therefore, you'll have a quiz at about the mid point and another quiz at the end point of the semester to be sure that the basic concepts and issues raised are clear in your mind. Both quizzes will be based on the weekly core readings and the lectures. Core constructs focus on the interface between the PODS constructs and each of the following: well-being and happiness, inclusion and belonging, cognition, memory and mental processes, social structure, and identity. Biological bases will be discussed as relevant, particularly to highlight interface between each of these basic social constructs and impact on the body.

**Class outline for MONDAYS 9-12:**

**Week 1 Sept 10****Overview, some working definitions of well-being and happiness, identity-safe vs. identity-threat environments**

I'll go over the syllabus and class structure and assignments. The course focuses attention on human well-being and happiness, and on how prejudice, oppression, discrimination and structural barriers (PODS) influence us both in terms of everyday functioning and in terms of their impact on biological processes. As much as possible, I'll use sources from across the social sciences and link well-being and change through the life course to current information about mind-body interface.

Humans are social beings, to thrive, we need to feel accepted, connected, and valued. In that sense, our identities are at core social and cultural and reflect the sense we make of who we are and can become, PODS is integral to this process. The first three sessions focus on inter-group processes related to creating identity-safe vs. identity threat environments; these sessions explore the classroom context and ways to reduce prejudice, oppression, discrimination and structural barriers (PODS) and increase safe learning. Though focused on the classroom, they can apply to any group situation.

Today I'll provide some definitions of well-being and happiness and discuss identity-based motivation and identity-safe vs. identity-threat environments. Identity-based motivation is a model for understanding choice in context, identity-safe (vs. identity-threat) contexts are contexts in which meaning is made using culture-relevant models, contexts that are free from threat of stereotyping and prejudice, contexts in which models of success are inclusive and provide positive in-group representations.

*Core reading:*

Lecture notes

*Suggested readings*

Markus, H., Steele, C., & Steele, D. (2001). Color-blindness as a barrier to inclusion. In R. Shweder, M. Minow, & H. Markus (Eds.), *Engaging cultural difference: The multicultural challenge in liberal democracies* (pp.453-472). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Or

Markus, H., Steele, C. & Steele, D. (2001). Color-blindness as a barrier to inclusion: assimilation and nonimmigrant minorities. *Daedalus*, 129, 233-254.

Oyserman, D., Fryberg, S., & Yoder, N. (In press). Identity-based motivation and health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

**Week 2 Sept 17.****Intergroup contact and intergroup dialogue**

What kinds of diversity initiatives and cross-racial interactions foster learning among diverse students? In response to that question, University of Michigan students and faculty worked together to review social psychological theories that inform diversity programs. Gordon W. Allport developed one of the most comprehensive and influential volumes in research on intergroup relations, with the publication of his 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. Allport challenged the notion that simple encounters among different people would be sufficient to reduce prejudice. In its stead, he proposed a series of situational conditions for intergroup contact that he deemed necessary for fundamental changes in intergroup prejudice. Building on this base, UM researchers moved beyond these bases to develop a model that uses group identities as resources for intergroup understanding and collaboration. This model, called *intergroup dialogue*, engages students in exploring commonalities and differences in group identities and experiences, working constructively with intergroup conflicts, and building collective identities as socially just people. Four factors appear key to the process: (1) appreciating difference, (2) engaging self, (3) critical self-reflection, and (4) alliance building. The initial development of the model was forged by Biren Ratnesh Nagda, then a doctoral student in the joint social work and social sciences doctoral program, along with Patricia Gurin, his faculty advisor. The work has grown and continued. Today, our guest is Nicholas Sorensen who has been working with the intergroup dialogue process for seven years, first as an undergraduate and now as a graduate student, both running dialogues, training others to run dialogues, and providing the first ever randomized assignment evaluation of the dialogues. To get a taste of the process, today we'll first participate in an intergroup dialogue activity and then, time permitting learn about the process.

*Core readings:*

Gurin, P. & Nagda, B. (2006). Getting to the *What, How, and Why* of diversity on campus. *Educational Researcher*, 35, 20-24.

Nagda, B. (2006). Breaking barriers, crossing borders, building bridges: Communication processes in intergroup dialogues *Journal of Social Issues*, 62, 553-576.

Tropp, L. & Pettigrew, T. (2005). Relationships between intergroup contact and prejudice among minority and majority status groups. *Psychological Science*, 16, 951–957.

*Suggested readings:*

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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Nagda, B., Gurin, P., & Lopez, G. (2003). Transformative pedagogy for democracy and social justice. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 6, 165 – 191.

Gurin, P., Nagda, B., & Lopez, G. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues* 60, 17–34.

Pettigrew, T. (1999). Gordon Willard Allport: A tribute. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 415–427.

Pettigrew, T., & Tropp, L. (2005). Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis: Its history and influence (pp. 262–277). In J. Dovidio, P. Glick, & L. A. Rudman (Eds.), *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

**Week 3 Sept 24      Fitting in and belonging in the early years: The jigsaw classroom and developmental intergroup theory.**

The jigsaw classroom method was developed by Elliott Aronson as a way to instill cooperative learning; it focused initially on fifth grade classrooms but has been used all the way up to college classrooms as well as down to earlier grades. His textbook, the *Social Animal*, is a classic social psychology textbook and he used his understanding of social psychology to develop and test the intervention. From a developmental perspective, Becky Bigler has focused on development of prejudice and stereotyping and how teachers and classrooms can inadvertently foster it but can also reduce it.

*Core Readings:*

Gilbert, S. (March 27, 2001). No One Left to Hate: Averting Columbines. *New York Times*.

Bigler, R. & Liben, L. (2007). Developmental intergroup theory: Explaining and reducing children's social stereotyping and prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16, 162-166.

Killen, M. (2007). Children's social and moral reasoning about exclusion. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16, 32-36.

Patterson, M. & Bigler, R. (2007). Relations among social identities, intergroup attitudes, and schooling: Perspectives from intergroup theory and research. Chapter 3 In A. Fuligni (Ed.), *Contesting stereotypes and creating identities: Social categories, identities and educational participation*. New York: Russell-Sage.

*Suggested Readings:*

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P.R. (2007). Boosting attachment security to promote mental health, prosocial values, and inter-group tolerance. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18, 139-156.

**Week 4 Oct 1 Thinking about yourself: Basic elements of positive self-regard**

In addition to experiencing inclusion and exclusion, individuals are likely to draw conclusions from these experiences and make predictions about future experiences. Today's session focuses on what happens to self-concept of individuals who experience inclusion and exclusion. Self-concept can be thought of as what we think of when we think about ourselves. We compare ourselves to others, rate ourselves against personal standards, and are influenced by how others view us.

We can reflect on ourselves, imagine ourselves in the future, and these possible selves are likely to influence our ability to persist in goal pursuit. Because we can think about who we are and who we want to become, we can deliberately work toward self improvement. Thus, a full understanding of human thought, emotion, and behavior requires consideration of the self.

Because we are social beings, we are motivated to create a positive impression on others, especially those who matter to us. Thus, no matter what else they may be doing, people typically monitor and control their public identities--a process known as *self-presentation*

or *impression management*. A great deal of human behavior is, in part, determined or constrained by people's concerns with others' impressions and evaluations of them.

Mark Leary has focused on a new conceptualization of self-esteem and self-esteem motivation which he calls sociometer theory. He suggests that the self-esteem system is an internal, psychological gauge that monitors the degree to which the individual is being included versus excluded by other people. Self-esteem, then, is not a person's own personal self-evaluation as much as it is an internal representation of social acceptance and rejection. It is possible to understand much behavior in terms of a fundamental motivation to be socially accepted by other people.

*Core Readings:*

Leary, M. (1999). Making sense of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 32-35.

Oyserman, D. (2001). Self-concept and identity. In A. Tesser & N. Schwarz, *The Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 499-517). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

*Suggested Readings:*

Leary, M. R. (2006). Sociometer theory and the pursuit of relational value: Getting to the root of self-esteem. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 16, 75-111.

Leary, M. R., Adams, C. E., & Tate, E. B. (2006). Hypo-egoic self-regulation: Exercising self-control by diminishing the influence of the self. *Journal of Personality*, 74, 1803-1832.

Markus, H. & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38, 299-337.

Leary, M. R. (2007). Motivational and emotional aspects of the self. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 317-344.

**Week 5 Oct 8      Culture judgment, self-concept, well-being**

**4 PAGE PERSONAL REFLECTION DUE**

What is culture? How do different social sciences define it and when and how does culture matter? In today's session we focus particularly on both definitions of culture and on when and how culture may matter, with particular emphasis on how culture influences judgment, self-concept and well-being.

*Core readings:*

Kunda, Z. (1999). Culture. Chapter 11 in *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People*. MIT CogNet Press.

Borofsky, R., Barth, F., Shweder, R., Rodseth, L. Stolzenberg, N. (2001). WHEN: A conversation about culture. *American Anthropologist*, 103, 432-446.

*Suggested readings:*

Frey, F. E., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). Being seen as individuals versus as group members: Extending research on metaperception to intergroup contexts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*, 265-280.

Kwan, V., John, O., Kenny, D., Bond, M., Robins, R., (2004). Reconceptualizing individual differences in self-enhancement bias: an interpersonal approach. *Psychological Review, 111*, 94-110.

**OCT 15-16 STUDY BREAK****Week 6 Oct 22      Health and well-being effects of poverty, stress, discrimination and unfair treatment**

Poverty is associated with stressful life conditions including exposure to violence. Minority status is associated with additional stress of exposure to discrimination. Stress, unfair treatment and discrimination all occur over the lifespan, beginning in early years of life. There is evidence that taken together, these events increase allostatic load, or psychophysiological hyperactivity – the extent that the body is chronically in a state of preparedness, and that this chronic state can have negative effects on health and well-being, including capacity to focus and concentrate.

*Core readings:*

Quick up-look summary of the brain

Gibbons, F., Yeh, H., Gerrard, M., Cleveland, M., Cutrona, C., Simons, R., Brody, G. (2007). Early experience with racial discrimination and conduct disorder as predictors of subsequent drug use: A critical period hypothesis. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 88S*, S27-S37.

Gillespie, C.F. & Nemeroff, C.B. (2007). Corticotropin-releasing factor and the psychobiology of early-life stress. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 16*, 85-89.

Motivala, S.J., & Irwin, M.R. (2007). Sleep and immunity: Cytokine pathways linking sleep and health outcomes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 16*, 21–25.

*Suggested reading:*

House, J.S. (2002). Understanding social factors and inequalities in health: 20<sup>th</sup> century progress and 21<sup>st</sup> century prospects. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 43*, 125-142.

Eaton, W.W., Muntaner, C., Bovasso, G., & Smith, C. (2001). Socioeconomic status and depressive syndrome: The role of inter- and intra-generational mobility, government assistance, and work environment. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior,*



42, 277-294.

**Week 7 Oct 29      Health and well-being effects of neighborhood and family poverty**

This week we continue to look at the ways that contexts, including family and neighborhood poverty can produce adverse effects on health, mental health and well-being.

*Core readings:*

Chen, E. (2004). Why socioeconomic status affects the health of children: A psychosocial perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13, 112-115.

Taylor, S., & Repetti, R., & Seeman, T. (1997). Health psychology: What is an unhealthy environment and how does it get under the skin? *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48, 411-447.

*Suggested readings:*

Evans, G.W. (2004). The environment of childhood poverty. *American Psychologist*, 59, 77-92.

Levanthal, T. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). The neighborhoods they live in: The effects of neighborhood residence on child and adolescent outcome. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 309-337.

Mehana, M., & Reynolds, A.J. (2004). School mobility and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 93-119.

**Week 8 Nov 5      Money, Health and Happiness**

IN CLASS QUIZ 1 (covers core concepts from sessions 1-7)

Last week we focused on poverty and stressors, today we focus on health and money. We all know the saying “money cannot buy happiness” but is that really true? What about the reverse, for example, is there a relationship between low income and happiness? Are people with health problems or disabilities as happy as people without them? What may this mean for social work practice? Good decision making often requires accurate predictions about how potential outcomes will make one feel. Session four focuses on explicitly on happiness, what it is, how we measure it, what it is and is not related to. Discussion focus is on how this applies both to our clients and to our own thinking.

*Core readings:*

Kahneman, D., Krueger, A., Schkade, D., Schwarz, N., Stone, A. (2006). Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion. *Science*, 312, 1908-1910.

Ubel, P., Loewenstein, G., Schwarz, N., & Smith, D. (2005). Mis-imagining the unimaginable: The disability paradox and health care decision making. *Health Psychology, 24*, S57–S62.

Frey, B. & Stutzer, A. (2002). What can economists learn from happiness research? *Journal of Economic Literature, 40*, 402–435.

## **Week 9 Nov 12 Talking and Thinking about happiness**

When bad things happen, some people keep it to themselves, some ruminate, some share. When good things happen, some people savor them and relive them; others focus on how things could have turned out differently. Some people write about their experiences in a journal; others talk about their happy times and their concerns with friends or family; still others prefer to think about their situation privately or not do anything at all. Whether the significant experience is negative (e.g., an injury, death of a friend, loss of salary, divorce) or positive (e.g., marriage, birth of a child, promotion, graduation), the way that one responds to the experience may differentially affect the outcome for one's well-being and health.

Our focus today is on examining which ways of processing negative and positive experiences are most beneficial and examining why this might be the case.

Experiencing unpleasant or traumatic circumstances can affect an individual's sense of meaning and order in the world. Consequently, seeking to restore meaning and order is a common and adaptive way of coping with negative events. However not all ways of seeking meaning are created equal. It turns out that the ways people process their thoughts under adverse circumstances (whether they thinking privately versus journal or talk about their experiences) can influence whether the outcome for mental and physical health is favorable or unfavorable. Ruminating about negative events is bad for health and well-being but writing or talking to someone else has beneficial effects.

An emerging body of evidence suggests that how we process positive experiences is also extremely important for health and well-being. Analyzing happy times mutes their positive effects but simply reliving them, re-experiencing the joys, sharing them with others, is helpful.

As we will discuss later in the semester, these results have social structural implications as well. Cultures and cultural groups that emphasize sharing may improve health and well-being in spite of stresses and negative life events.

### *Core reading:*

Lyubomirsky, S., Sousa, L., & Dickerhoof, R. (2006). The costs and benefits of writing, talking, and thinking about life's triumphs and defeats. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 692-708.

## **Week 10 Nov 19      Optimism and positive thinking**

Americans believe in the power of positive thinking. But we also believe “a stitch in time saves nine”. Which is true? Should we be focusing our selves and our clients on the positive? Is there any evidence that optimism helps? What about the reverse, is there evidence that pessimism hurts? Session five at about optimism and the impact of the positive.

The first eight sessions, taken together, suggest ways that social isolation, inclusion and exclusion, unfair treatment, poverty and social contexts influence well-being and health and that how we share our experiences with others matters.

In the next three sessions, we focus on thinking and memory. As a social worker, can you help yourself and your clients to improve well-being, physical and mental health by how you think about your experiences? Clearly we act on the basis of our predictions about the environment (e.g., is it safe, how much control do I have). These predictions are based in prior experience; this means that it is critical to have some understanding of how we make sense of our world (memory and cognitive processes) and how these are influenced by development, social context, and biology. Sessions 8-10 focus on these issues.

### *Core readings:*

Taylor, S., Kemeny, M., Reed, G., Bower, J., & Gruenewald, T. (2000). Psychological resources, positive illusions, and health. *American Psychologist*, 55, 99-109.

Mezulis, A., Abramson, L., Hyde, J., & Hankin, B.(2004). Is there a universal positivity bias in attributions? A meta-analytic review of individual, developmental, and cultural differences in the self-serving attributional bias. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 711-747.

### *Suggested readings:*

Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 193-210.

Chambers, J. & Windschitl, P. (2004). Biases in social comparative judgments: The role of nonmotivated factors in above-average and comparative-optimism effects. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 813-838.

## **Week 11 Nov 26      How we think influences the choices we make: framing and decision making**

Last week we focused on positive thinking. Of course, positive thinking is only helpful to the extent that it also produces action in pursuit of self-relevant and self-enhancing life goals. But we are all procrastinators – and have a bias toward doing nothing. Indeed, procrastination is such an in-grained human trait that economists have named the predictable results of our inability to act today the “I’ll save more tomorrow” effect.

Rather than berate ourselves for procrastinating, this week's session focuses on understanding how to frame choices in order to reduce the negative consequences of procrastination on consequential choices that social workers and their clients make. Given the pull of inertia, "default" options – what happens if one takes no action, can have an enormous impact on wellbeing.

Defaults matter for three key reasons: First, it is easier not to act. Second, not acting can be costly. Third, the cost of inaction now can become increasingly costly over time. These three effects imply that the choice of defaults can have significant consequences for social workers, clients and social welfare policy more generally. As shown in today's readings, setting things up so that the default produces progress towards one's goals has enormous positive consequences.

Another important feature of our thought processes is how we make sense of potential losses and gains. On average, across types of decisions and across people, losses feel more psychologically painful than gains feel pleasant. It hurts more to lose the rent money than it feels good to gain it. Given this, another important tactic for social workers is to make sure to frame decisions in terms of avoiding losses.

Whether choice is framed as leaving things (vs. acting to opt out) as is or as needing to take action (to opt in) matters for the choices we end up making. This is called "framing." Framing has a long history in decision research and has been shown to have sizable effects (Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Tversky and Kahneman 1987). The major cause of framing differences is (1) the fact that decisions can be framed as the loss of an option or as something to be gained and (2) that the cost of the loss looms larger than the pleasure of the equivalent gain. Although both options describe exactly the same transaction, these differences cause marked reversals in what people pick to do.

This session focuses on how the way we think about a choice influences the choice we make.

*Core readings:*

Choi, J.J., Laibson, D., Madrian, B.C., Metrick, A. Optimal Defaults. *The American Economic Review*, 93, 180-185.

Johnson, E.J., & Goldstein, D. (2003). Do defaults save lives? *Science*, 302, 1338-1339.

Bertrand, M., Mullainathan, S., & Shafir, E. (2006). Behavioral economics and marketing in aid of decision making among the poor. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 25, 8-23.

*Suggested Readings:*

Bertrand, M., Mullainathan, S., & Shafir, E. (2004). A behavioral-economics view of poverty. *The American Economic Review*, 94, 419-423.

Quattrone, G., & Tversky, A. (1988). Contrasting rational and psychological analyses of choice. *American Political Science Review*, 82, 719-736.

Johnson, E., Bellman, S., Lohse, G. (2002). Defaults, framing and privacy: Why opting in-opting out. *Marketing Letters*, 13, 5–15.

### **Week 12 Dec 3      Thinking about your life: healthy lessons from social cognition**

Work with clients can be difficult. A topic of interest for social workers is burn out and how to deal with negative feelings about the meaning of one's life and work in the face of stress and difficulty. Today's session focuses on what the field has learned about thinking as it relates to promoting a sense of meaning and well-being. A goal is to apply these healthy lessons both in one's own life and in one's interface with other professionals and with one's clients.

#### *Core readings:*

Smith, E.R. & Semin, G. (2007). Situated social cognition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16, 132-135.

Schwarz, N., & Strack, F. (2006). Thinking about your life: Healthy lessons from social cognition. In K. van den Bos, M. Hewstone, M. Stroebe, H. Schut, & J. de Wit (Eds.), *The scope of social psychology: Theory and applications. Essays in honor of Wolfgang Stroebe*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

### **Week 13 Dec 10      How we think influences the choices we make: subjective experience of ease**

Decades of psychological research documented that human judgment often falls short of normative ideals. Social and cognitive psychologists discovered an ever increasing number of systematic biases and illustrated their pervasive role in judgment and decision making. Similarly, researchers in applied fields like health psychology have identified numerous erroneous beliefs that impair good decisions and prevent people from doing what would be in their best interest. In both cases, the remedy seems obvious: If people only thought enough about the issues at hand, considered all the relevant information and employed proper reasoning strategies, their decision making would surely improve. This assumption is at the heart of numerous strategies that attempt to debias human judgment; it is likewise central to public information campaigns designed to dispel erroneous beliefs and to replace them with more accurate information. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by Norbert Schwarz and his colleagues, these attempts to improve decision making often fail to achieve their goals, even under conditions assumed to foster rational judgment.

Models of rational choice assume that people will expend more time and effort on getting it right when the stakes are high; hence, providing proper incentives should improve judgment. Many studies have attempted to show that either increasing incentives for getting the answer right or increasing accountability for a poor judgment results in better decision making. However, these studies have failed to show the desired results. One possible reason is that increased effort improves performance only when people already

possess strategies that are appropriate for the task at hand; in the absence of such strategies, raising the stakes simply cannot produce better results. But even when no particularly sophisticated strategy is required, trying harder does not necessarily result in any improvement—in fact, it may often backfire. This is the case for one of the most widely recommended debiasing strategies: encouraging people to “consider the opposite,” or to counterargue their initial response, by asking themselves, “What are some reasons that my initial judgment might be wrong?” Ironically, the more people try to consider the opposite, the more they often convince themselves that their initial judgment was right on target. The strategy of consider the opposite produces this unintended effect because it ignores the second piece of the puzzle: the metacognitive experiences that accompany the reasoning process. Similar surprises arise in the domain of public information campaigns. Presumably, erroneous beliefs can be dispelled by confronting them with contradictory evidence. Yet attempts to do so often increase later acceptance of the erroneous beliefs. The unintended effect arises because the educational strategy focuses solely on information content and ignores the metacognitive experiences that are part and parcel of the reasoning process. Today’s session focuses on the role of metacognitive experiences in judgment and decision making and explores their implications for debiasing strategies and public information campaigns.

*Core readings:*

Helweg-Larsen, M. & Collins, B.E. (1997). A social psychological perspective on the role of knowledge about AIDS in AIDS prevention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 6, 23-26.

Schwarz, N., Sanna, L., Skurnik, I., & Yoon, C. (2007). Metacognitive experiences and the intricacies of setting people straight: Implications for debiasing and public information campaigns. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 127-161.

*Suggested readings (Other influences on judgments):*

Copeland, J. (1993). Motivational approaches to expectancy confirmation. *Current Directions in Social Psychology*, 2, 117-121.

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Skurnik, I., Yoon, C., Park, D.C., & Schwarz, N. (2005). How warnings about false claims become recommendations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 713-724.