

Social and cognitive biases



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Cognitive bias is distortion in the way we perceive reality. A cognitive bias is a deviation or distortion in information processing, which manifests in a tendency toward processing information in a way that systematically favours particular conclusions. But in order to find out how cognitive bias may aid psychological practise we must first look at the different types of biases to have a better understanding of them. The two common cognitive biases of interest to behaviour consultants are Confirmation bias and self-serving bias. Confirmation bias is the inclination to seek or make sense of news or facts in a way that validates one's preconceptions. So, during the decision making process for psychologist they will refer to information that supports their decision more favourably. They will rarely give the obvious negative much consideration and since our beliefs and postulations are definitely prejudiced so the tendency to give more attention and weight to data that support our beliefs than we do to contrary data will subtly but gradually have a harmful effect.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that people generally give an excessive amount of value to confirmatory information, i. e., data which is positive or which supports a position. Thomas Gilovich (1993) speculates that " the most likely reason for the excessive influence of confirmatory information is that it is easier to deal with cognitively." (Gilovich, pg. 31) It is much easier to see how a piece of data supports a position than it is to see how it might count against the position. Charles Darwin (1876) noted that it is less likely to remember the comments or ideas that reinforced his hypotheses than those that apposed them. He made it a regular tendency of writing a note of disapproving or contradicting facts as when it became clear

to him and was in his awareness, and that was his way of protecting himself against his bias. However, a person's adherence of a potentially useful train of enquiry, as he pointed out, could be deterred from stratospheric and agnosticism.

The bias noted by Darwin is a confirmation bias that has been studied extensively. People tend to search for evidence to confirm their favoured hypotheses, and avoid or ignore potentially disconfirming evidence. So if disconfirmation allows us to abandon the testing of a hypothesis precipitately then we may be losing out on an opportunity for the hypothesis to establish its value. Many ideas that seem out of the ordinary at first sight prove to be successful on closer testing and scrutiny.

Similar to Darwin, people with emotional disorders display biased patterns of cognition, operating to favour the series of emotionally negative information. The firm findings that bias with threatening information is what distinguishes anxiety disorders. Cognitive accounts have implicated this bias in the genesis and maintenance of anxiety pathology. However, it is only recently that clinical researchers have developed training procedures capable of directly modifying cognitive biases and have sought to evaluate the capacity of these procedures to therapeutically ameliorate emotional dysfunction. MacLeod C and Mathews (2011) reviewed the research that has sought to evaluate the causal contributions such biases make to anxiety dysfunction and to therapeutically alleviate anxiety using cognitive-bias modification (CBM) procedures. After taking everything in mind the purpose and nature of CBM methodologies, it was demonstrated that variants designed to alter selective attention (CBM-A) or interpretation (CBM-I) have demonstrated the

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capability of decreasing anxiety vulnerability and ameliorating dysfunctional anxiety.

Self-serving bias is the common human tendency to attribute one's positive outcomes or successes to personal factors, and one's negative outcomes to external factors or factors beyond one's control. Self-serving biases in thinking can accordingly have a general driving, motivational, function. It can quickly accomplish the thorough analysis of productive ideas that older systems that have led either to exhaustive but incapable testing of old ground or to sterile scepticism. Sceptics are not able to move forward and progress as quick as Enthusiasts with a clear, although not necessarily realistic vision. Some self-serving thinking may be the result that generates the enthusiasm to pursue goals.

The hypothesis that biased thinking may enhance motivation is supported indirectly by studies of the cognitive styles of depressed people. The impairment of the neural mechanism of motivation is what becomes of the depression as well as negatively biased attention and thinking. In Gotlib, McLachlan and Katz studies of visual attention tasks, depressed people scanned their environment more exhaustively. A present study, similar to that employed by MacLeod, Mathews, and Tata (1986) utilised a cognitive paradigm to examine attentional biases in mildly depressed persons. Twelve depressed and 12 non-depressed subjects were given an attentional task to which they had a series of word pairs presented to them through tachistoscope. They were presented with three types of word pairs, each with one word printed above the other: manic-neutral, depressed-neutral and manic-depressed. Selective attention to one member of a word pair was

assessed using a perception task. Based on cognitive models of depression, it was hypothesised that the depressed subjects would attend more to depressed-content words than to manic- or neutral-content words, whereas the non-depressed subjects would not exhibit any attentional biases. In contrast to these predictions, analyses indicated that whereas the depressed subjects attended equally to depressed-, manic-, and neutral-content words, the non-depressed subjects attended more to manic-content than they did to neutral- or depressed-content words. These results add support to the documentation of even-handedness in the cognitive functioning of depressed subjects, and of self-serving biases in non-depressed subjects. Therefore, becoming aware of the concept that a depressed mood may view the world realistically, while normal people use narrow, optimistic and openly self-serving biases. Severe depression may lead to paralyzing somberness that is unsuitably adapted. However, Beck, Rush, Shaw and Emery (1979) stated that psychotherapies could actually improve some forms of depression. The way psychotherapies work is by teaching problem-solving or making an attempt to change negative to positive thinking. The subtle stress relieving and anxiolytic effects of normal biased thinking may therefore aid adaptive behaviour.

Cognitive biases are heuristics that shape individual preferences, decisions and judgement. Once a person has adopted their opinions, either because it has become very fond of them or because they were already approved of and believed, it gathers everything else to back up and accede with them. And though it may meet a greater number and weight of contrary instances, it will, with great and harmful prejudice, disregard or overlook or eliminate

them by familiarising some distinction. In order that the authority of those earlier assumptions may remain intact and protected. Similar to the characteristics of anchoring bias which is the tendency to overly confident or be reliant on certain information or a certain value and then adjust to that value to account for other elements of the circumstance. Often referred to as the common cognitive trap of allowing first impressions to exert undue influence on the diagnostic process. Often, this initial diagnostic impression will prove correct, although in some occasions subsequent development in a patients course will prove inconsistent with first impression.

Whereas illusion of control is the tendency for human beings to believe they can control or at least influence outcomes that they demonstrably have no influence over. Ellen Langer's (1975) made it aware that people often conduct themselves as if chance events are able to be in their control. In series of experiments, Langer demonstrated first the prevalence of the illusion of control and second, that where skill cues were present, that people are more likely to behave as if they were capable of exercising chance.

When information is learned and then evaluated, and that is best done from an impartial perspective. Bias affects decision-making by tampering with the way information is incorporated into decisions and it can weight information in a way that is inaccurate from an un-biased or neutral perspective. All decision making involves choices of future courses of action. Therefore, these courses of action as well as their outcomes need to be represented in thought and imagination. Although, cognitive bias gives us the self-determination and driven personality that enables us to identify problems. Cognitive bias allows you to stay focused, persistent and optimistic even if

the results of your study or predictions are not yet showing in your favour. All these reasons attribute to a persons' road to accomplishment and achievement. Cummins and Nistico proposed that well-being homeostasis is controlled by positive cognitive biases pertaining to the self. Most particular in this regard are the positive biases in connection to, optimism control and self-esteem. Past controversy's in relation to this proposition are analysed and resolved in favour of the suggested mechanism. The empirical data to support this hypothesis are discussed in the context of perceived well-being as an adaptive human attribute. So, we may use this in our favour to understand and accept ourselves and our relationship with others or to simply learn new ways to view and manage future challenges in life.