SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

Social categorization refers to the division of our social world into various groups.

Social categorization often results in the us versus them feeling

Viewing the social world as divided into in group and out group often influences how we think, feel and act towards members whom we view as in group members and others whom we view as out group members.

Tajfelgb , Billig, Bundy, and Flament (1971) assigned individuals to one group or the other randomly, but were told that it was based on whether they had shared a preference for Klee or Kandinsky paintings.

Participants on average awarded members of their own group more money than members of the other group.

Furthermore, when participants could choose to allocate more money in absolute terms to members of their own group, they chose to allocate smaller absolute amounts if that would also mean allocating relatively less to members of the other group, suggesting that the participants were attempting to maximize the difference between the rewards given to the two groups.

These findings showed that people could be divided into distinct categories on almost any basis, and doing so could result in different perceptions of, and actions toward, us (members of their own group) versus them (members of the other group).

People in the "us" category are viewed in more favorable terms, whereas those in the "them" category are perceived more negatively.

Social categorization is also one of the causes of prejudice.

To enhance ones own social identity, we tend to show favouritism towards in group members and bias against out group members, in an attempt to increase our own value and esteem.

SOCIAL COMPARISON

How do we evaluate ourselves and decide whether we're good or bad in various domains, what our best and worst traits are, and how likable we are to others? Social psychologists believe that

All human judgment is relative to some comparison standard (Kahneman & Miller, 1986).

how we think and feel about ourselves will depend on the standard of comparison we use.

downward social comparison

A comparison of the self to another who does less well than or is inferior to us.

upward social comparison

A comparison of the self to another who does better than or is superior to us.

Models of social comparison

Different models have been proposed to explain why do we compare ourselves to others and what are its consequences.

social comparison theory

Festinger (1954) suggested that people compare themselves to others because for many domains and attributes there is no objective yardstick to evaluate ourselves against, and other people are therefore highly informative.

other people are therefore used as a standard to measure ourselves against.

Feeling uncertain about ourselves is one of the central conditions that leads people to engage in social comparison and otherwise assess the extent to which we are meeting cultural norms

Whom do we choose as a comparison point depends on our motive for comparison.

In general, the desire to see ourselves positively appears to be more powerful than either the desire to accurately assess ourselves or to verify strongly held beliefs about ourselves (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003).

Festinger (1954) originally suggested we can gauge our abilities most accurately by comparing our performance with someone who is similar to us.

similarity tends to be based on broad social categories, such as gender, race, or experience in a particular task domain (Goethals & Darley, 1977; Wood, 1989).

Often, by using comparisons with others who share a social category with us, we can judge ourselves more positively than when we compare ourselves with others who are members of a different social category (especially if members of that category are more advantaged than our own)

This is partly because there are different performance expectations for members of different categories in particular domains

self-evaluation maintenance model (Tesser, 1988)

This perspective suggests that to maintain a positive view of ourselves, we distance ourselves from others who perform better than we do on valued dimensions and move closer to others who perform worse than us.

This view suggests that doing so will protect our self-esteem.

Self-evaluation maintenance

Social identity theory

According to social identity theory, we are motivated to perceive our groups positively, and

this should especially be the case for those who most strongly value a particular social identity.

Other people, when categorized as a member of the same group as ourselves, can help make our group more positive when they perform well.

The self evaluation maintenance model applies when we categorize the self at the personal level and we compare ourselves as an individual to another individual.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) applies when we categorize ourselves at the group level (e.g., as a woman), and the comparison other is categorized as sharing the same category as ourselves (e.g., another woman).

Whether the individual context of comparison is salient or the social context of comparison is salient may change the way we feel about ourselves.

Whether comparison is being made at the personal identity level or on the social identity level will also influence how we feel about the person we are comparing ourselves to.

When we compare ourselves on an interpersonal level, high performing others are viewed negatively (as it looks us look bad)

When we make comparisons at the social identity level, the same high performing other person from our in group might be viewed positively as they vicariously enhance our esteem.

Schmitt, Silvia, and Branscombe (2000): when participants believed their performance as an individual would be compared to the other person, they liked the poor-performing target more than the high-performing target who represented a threat to their positive personal self-image. In contrast, when participants categorized themselves in terms of the gender group that they shared with that person and the expected comparison was intergroup in nature (between women and men), then the high-performing other woman was evaluated more positively than the similar-to-self poor-performing other.