Principles of Social Psychology Version 2 0 2nd edition Stangor Solutions Manual

SKU: 9781453384954-SOLUTIONS

Chapter 2
Social Learning and Social Cognition

INTRODUCTION

Social cognition is the mental activity that relates to social activities, and which helps us meet the goal of understanding and predicting the behavior of ourselves and others. A fundamental part of social cognition involves **learning** – the relatively permanent change in knowledge that is acquired through experience.

The errors we make frequently occur because of our reliance on our schemas and attitudes and a general tendency to take shortcuts through the use of **cognitive heuristics**: information-processing rules of thumb that enable us to think in ways that are quick and easy but that may sometimes lead to error.

1. SOURCES OF SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

- Review the principles of operant, associational and observational learning and explain the similarities and differences among them.
- Explain how and when schemas and attitudes do and do not change as a result of the operation of accomodation and assimilation.
- Outline the ways that schemas are likely to be maintained through processes that create assimilation

Section Outline

- People have many memories about their experiences with other people, and use this information to make predictions about what people will do in the future; this is a result of learning.
- **Operant (instrumental) learning** is the principle that we learn new information as a result of the consequences of our behavior.
- **Associational learning** occurs when an object or event comes to be associated with a natural response, such as an automatic behavior or a positive or negative emotion.
    - It influences our knowledge about and our judgments of other people.
    - We react positively to people we associate with positive things.
    - We react negatively to people associated with negative things.
- **Observational learning** or **modeling** occurs when people learn by observing the behavior of others.
    - Observational learning allows people to learn without having to actually engage in what might be a risky behavior.
    - Research by Albert Bandura shows that children learn ways of aggressive behavior by observing others.
    - It is involved in much of our learning about our social worlds.
- Our schemas and our attitudes contain our knowledge and future expectations of the world around us.
    - They allow us to better understand people and make sense of information.
    - They influence our subsequent learning.
- When existing schemas change on the basis of new information, it is called **accommodation**.
- When existing knowledge influences new conflicting information to better fit with our existing knowledge the process is called **assimilation**.

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    - People are more likely to assimilate than accommodate information because once a schema is developed it is difficult to make changes.
- Our beliefs are hard to change.
    - A research study conducted by Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard (1975) showed that people tend to assimilate information even when they receive new information that is contradictory. The tendency for people to favor in- formation that confirms their expectations, regardless of whether the information is true is called **confirmation bias.**
    - Sometimes we accommodate new information because we want it to match our expectations.
    - Information that confirms our expectations is more likely to be processed.
    - Sometimes this leads to a **self-fulfilling prophecy** – a process when our expectations about others lead us to behave toward those others in ways that make those expectations come true.
    - Assimilation is one of the causes of inaccuracy of eyewitness testimony.

Exercises

1. Describe a time when you learned new information or new behavior through operant, associational, observational learning.
   Answer: Student answers will vary.
   Operant learning states that experiences that are followed by positive emotions are likely to be repeated; experiences that are followed by negative emotions are less likely to be repeated. Students need to recall a time (i) when they repeated an activity because they were praised/rewarded for it (ii) when they resisted an activity because they had been punished for it.
   Associational learning occurs when an object or event comes to be associated with a natural response, such as an automatic behavior or a positive or negative emotion. Students need to recall a time (i) when they reacted positively to someone whom they considered attractive (2) when they reacted negatively to someone whom they considered unattractive.
   Observational learning comes from the observing the behavior of other people. Students need to recall a time when they imitated the behavior of someone else without any knowledge of the context or situation.

2. Think about a time when you made a snap judgment about another person. Did your expectations about people influence your judgments of this person? Was the judgment fair or unfair?
   Answer: Students answers will vary.
   The students need to recall a time when they did not have any knowledge about a particular person but quickly made a judgment about his/her personality. They need to ask themselves why they made judgment and whether they were correct or incorrect in their assessment.

3. Consider some of your beliefs about the people you know. Do you think that your behaviors toward them lead you to maintain your expectations about them?
   Answer: Students answers will vary.
   Students need to think about (i) a person they have a favorable opinion about (ii) a person they have an unfavorable opinion about. They need to ask themselves why they feel the way do; and whether their opinion is based on the person's actual behavior or their perception of them.

4. Describe a time when you might have unfairly used an expectation about another person. Did the expectation serve as an energy saver?
   Answer: Student answers will vary.

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Our learning is stored as knowledge in schemas. Our schemas allow us to better understand people sometimes make guesses about how they will react in a situation. Students are required to think about a time when they tried to guess how a person would react to a particular situation and used this to their advantage. They need to think if they were right in their expectation and whether it worked for their benefit.

Additional Exercises

1. Think of a person that you do not know well. Interact with this person over the next 15 days. What was your initial impression of the person? Has this opinion changed?
   Answer: Students answers will vary.
   Students need to interact with a person in the class, whom they are not well acquainted with. They need to record these interactions and at the end of the 15 days, need to observe how they both behaved and what helped them to form an opinion of each other.

2. HOW WE USE OUR EXPECTATIONS

- Provide examples of how slaience and accessibility influence information processing
- Review, differentiate, and give examples of the cognitive heuristics that influence social judgment.

Section Outline

- Once we have developed a set of schemas and attitudes, we naturally use that information to help us judge and respond to others. Refer to Table 2.1: How Expectations Influence our Social Cognition.
- **Automatic cognition** refers to thinking that occurs out of our awareness, quickly and without taking much effort.
  - Things that we do most frequently tend to become more automatic each time we do them.
  - It occurs outside of our conscious awareness.
- When we deliberately size up and think about something – we call it **thoughtful** (or **controlled**) **cognition**.
- **Priming** is the technique in which information is temporarily brought into memory through exposure to situational events.
  - Bargh, Chen & Burrows (1996) found a relation between automatic cognition and priming.
- We are likely to judge people based on characteristics that are **salient** – those that attract our attention when we see someone or something.
  - People ignore more important but less salient information over information which is less important but relatively more salient.
  - Information which occurs across a large population is called **base rates**.
- We also base our judgments on things that represent or match our expectations; this is called **representativeness heuristic**.
  - When a schema is accessible, we are likely to use it to make judgments of ourselves and others.
  - Accessibility is often influenced by situational factors.
- **Cognitive accessibility** refers to the extent to which knowledge is activated in memory, and thus likely to be used in information processing.
- **Processing fluency** refers to the ease with which we can process information in our environments.

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- The tendency to make judgments of the frequency or likelihood that an event occurs on the basis of the ease with which they can be retrieved from memory is known as the **availability heuristic**.
- **False consensus bias** is the tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people are similar to us.
    - Our own beliefs influence our perceptions of others.
    - We also tend to view ourselves more positively than the average person.
- **Counterfactual thinking** leads us to think of situations in terms of "what might have been".
    - If a situation is better than we had expected, we are happier.
    - Medvec, Madey, and Gilovich (1995) in their research showed that bronze medalists are, on average, happier than silver medalists.
- **Anchoring** and **adjustment** leads us to accept ideas that we should revise.
- Another potential bias in perception comes from overconfidence in our own abilities.
    - Many people have been wrongfully convicted on the basis of inaccurate eyewitness testimony given by overconfident witnesses.
- Research shows that people who should know better – and who need to know better, are also subject to cognitive biases.
    - Economists, stock traders, managers, lawyers, and even doctors make the same mistakes in their professional activities that people make in their everyday lives.
- Although biases are common, they are not impossible to control.
    - Better feedback on decisions can improve bias.
- Cognitive processes become important in areas of social importance such as eyewitness testimony.
    - Crimes occur quickly in situations of great stress and that leads to inaccurate coding of information.
    - People may be particularly inaccurate when they are asked to identify members of a race other than their own.
    - Another setting in which eyewitnesses may be inaccurate is when they try to identify suspects from mugshots or lineups.

Exercises

1. Given an example of a time when you may have committed one of the cognitive errors listed in Table 2.1. What was the outcome of your use of the shortcut or heuristic?
   Answer: Students answers will vary with the cognitive errors they choose. Students are required to refer to Table 2.1: How expectations influence social cognition and find any one error that they have committed.
   Automatic cognition refers to thinking that occurs out of our awareness, quickly and without taking much effort. When we deliberately size up and think about something – we call it thoughtful (or controlled) cognition.

2. Go to the website http://thehothand.blogspot.com, which analyzes the extent to which people accurately perceive "streakiness" in sports. Consider how our sports perceptions are influenced by our expectations and the use of cognitive heuristics.
   Answer: Students answers will vary.
   "Streakiness" in sports depends on the expectations people have from their favorite teams. For example, Dallas Mavricks' fans would expect their team to perform well this season because they won the previous one. Similarly, cognitive heuristics can influence a team's performance. For example, a Colorado Rockies' fan may think that the team will win the match in Denver because it won the last 5 matches played at its home ground.

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Additional Exercises

1. Think of a situation where the problem of anchoring and adjustment has biased your decision.
   Answer: Students answers will vary.
   Anchoring and adjustment leads us to accept ideas that we should revise. Students need to think of a situation where knowledge of a particular aspect from people who are close to them has prevented them from doing things which, otherwise, they would have done.

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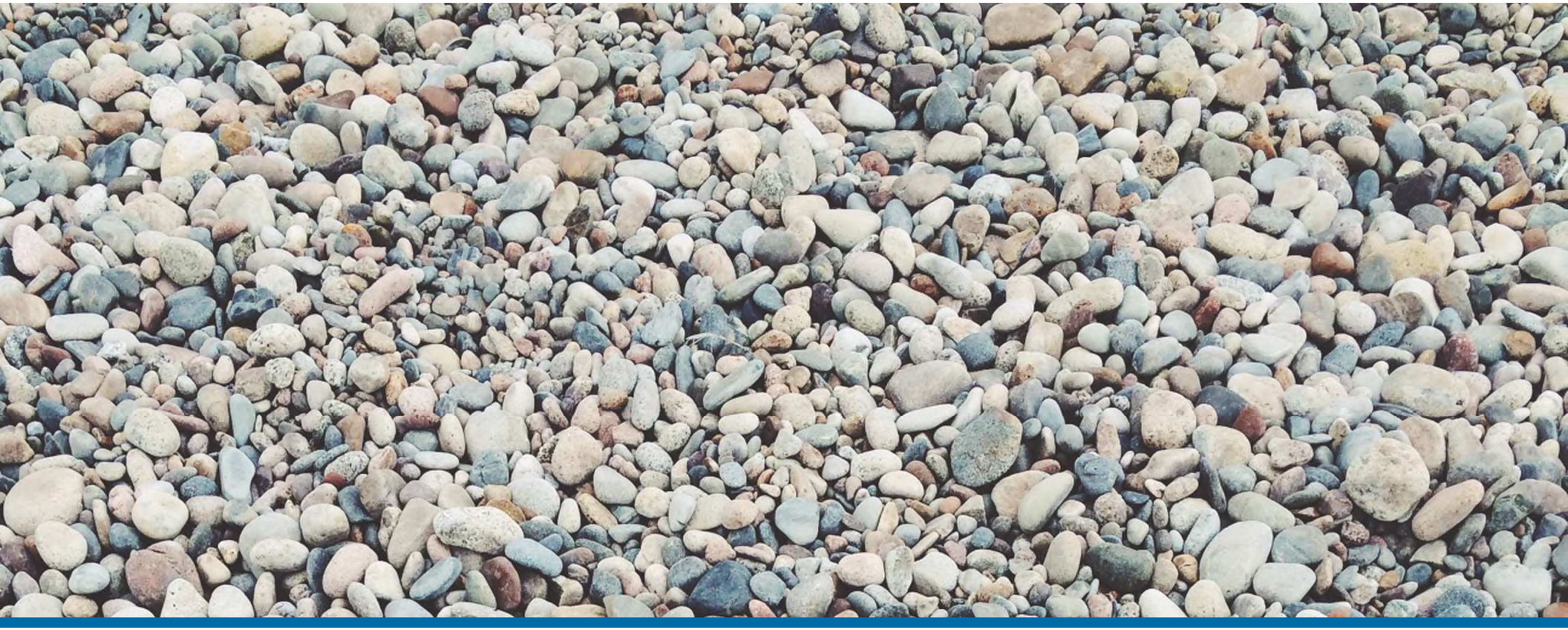

Principles of Social Psychology, V2.0

By Charles Stangor

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CHAPTER 2
Social Learning and Social Cognition

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Review the principles of operant, associational, and observational learning and explain the similarities and differences among them.
- Explain how and when schemas and attitudes do and do not change as a result of the operation of accommodation and assimilation.
- Outline the ways that schemas are likely to be maintained through processes that create assimilation.
- Provide examples of how salience and accessibility influence information processing.
- Review, differentiate, and give examples of the cognitive heuristics that influence social judgment.
- Summarize and give examples of the importance of social cognition in everyday life.

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INTRODUCTION

- **Social cognition**: the mental activity that relates to social activities, and which helps us meet the goal of understanding and predicting the behavior of ourselves and others
- **Learning**: the relatively permanent change in knowledge that is acquired through experience
- **Cognitive heuristics**: information-processing rules of thumb that enable us to think in ways that are quick and easy but that may sometimes lead to error

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SOURCES OF SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE: A RESULT OF LEARNING

- **Conditioning:** the ability to connect stimuli (the changes that occur in the learning environment) with responses (behaviors or other actions)

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OPERANT LEARNING

- **Operant (Instrumental) learning:** we learn new information as a result of the consequences of our behavior
  - Experiences that are followed by negative emotions (punishments) are less likely to be repeated

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ASSOCIATIONAL LEARNING

- **Associational learning:** occurs when an object or event comes to be associated with a natural response, such as an automatic behavior or a positive or negative emotion
  - Influences our knowledge about and our judgments of other people
  - We have positive feelings toward the people we associate with positive things
  - Negatives:
    - We may dislike people from certain racial or ethnic groups because we frequently see them portrayed in the media as associated with violence, drug use, or terrorism
    - We may avoid people with certain physical characteristics simply because they remind us of other people we know that we do not like

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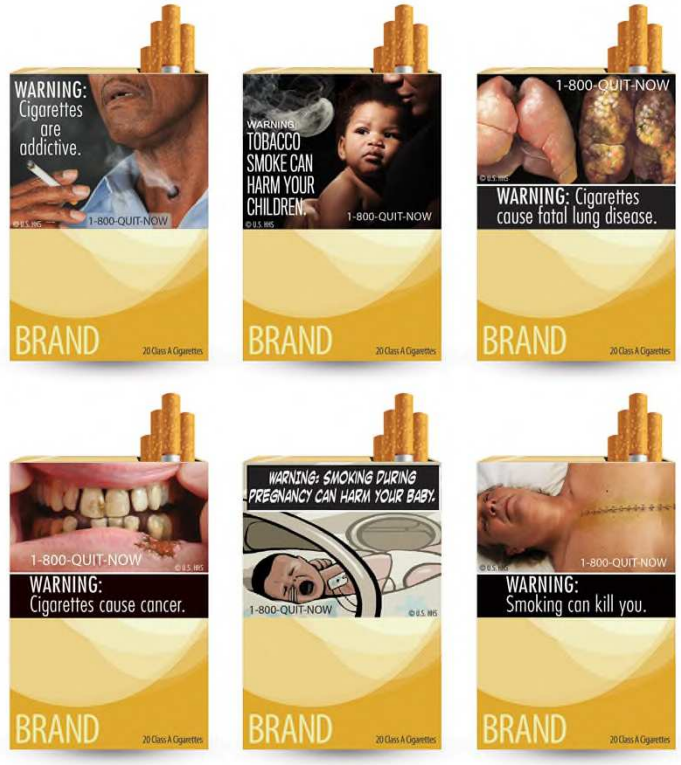
EXAMPLE OF ASSOCIATIONAL LEARNING

- The goal of these images is to associate the fear of dying with cigarette smoking.



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OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING (MODELING)

- **Observational learning (modeling):** learning that occurs through exposure to the behavior of others
  - It's involved in much of our learning about our social worlds
  - Observational learning is useful because it allows people to learn without having to actually engage in what might be a risky behavior

- Bandura's research on observational learning:
  - Observational learning as a fundamental determinant of all social behavior
  - Not all behaviors are modeled equally
  - How we learn is influenced by the type of behavior, the people performing the behavior, and our understanding of the observed behavior
  - Modeling is most likely when people pay attention to the behavior of models and are motivated to imitate them

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SCHEMAS AS SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

- Our schemas and our attitudes contain our knowledge and our evaluations of the world around us
- They reside primarily in the *prefrontal cortex*
  - **Prefrontal cortex**: the part of the brain that lies in front of the motor areas of the cortex, and helps us remember the characteristics and actions of people, plan complex social behaviors, and coordinate our behaviors with those of others

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HOW SCHEMAS DEVELOP

- Because they represent our past experience, and because past experience is useful for prediction, our schemas and attitudes serve as expectations about future events
- Having a database of social knowledge to draw on is extremely useful
- Our schemas and our attitudes allow us to better understand people, and help us make sense of information, particularly when the information is unclear or ambiguous

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ACCOMMODATION AND ASSIMILATION

- Different people have different past experiences - their schemas and attitudes are different
  - Helps explain why different people draw different conclusions about the same events
  - Our schemas and attitudes influence our subsequent learning
- **Accommodation**: when existing schemas change on the basis of new information
- **Assimilation**: a process in which our existing knowledge influences new conflicting information to better fit with our existing knowledge, thus reducing the likelihood of schema change

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HOW SCHEMAS MAINTAIN THEMSELVES: THE POWER OF ASSIMILATION

- The tendency toward assimilation is so strong that it can often cause *confirmation bias*
  - **Confirmation bias:** the tendency for people to favor information that confirms their expectations, regardless of whether the information is true
- Expectations influence:
  - What we attend to
  - What we remember
- One frequent outcome is that information that confirms our expectations is more easily processed, and more easily understood, and thus has a bigger impact, than does information that disconfirms our expectations
- However, we do not only remember information that matches our expectations
  - We encounter and remember information that is extreme and conflicting with our expectations

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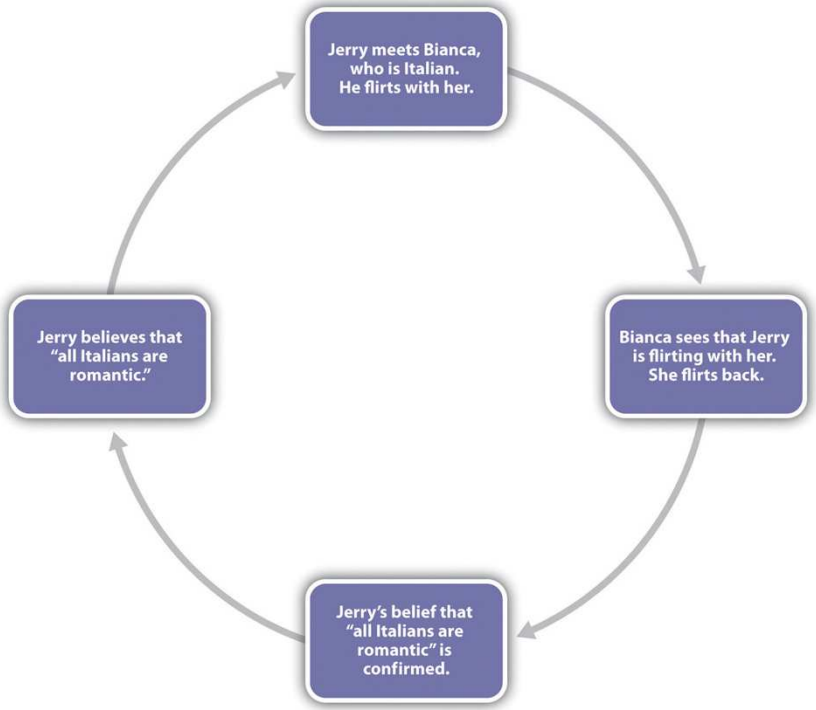
SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

- **Self-fulfilling prophecy:** a process that occurs when our expectations about others lead us to behave toward those others in ways that make those expectations come true



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AUTOMATIC VERSUS CONTROLLED COGNITION

- **Automatic cognition**: thinking that occurs out of our awareness, quickly and without taking much effort
  - Examples: riding a bike, operating a TV remote control
  - Judgements about others (especially people we don't know well) become automatic
- **Thoughtful (Controlled) cognition**: when we deliberately size up and think about something
  - We frequently rely on automatic cognition, because thoughtful cognition takes a lot of effort and time
  - **Priming:** a technique in which information is temporarily brought into memory through exposure to situational events

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SALIENCE AND ACCESSIBILITY DETERMINE WHICH EXPECTATIONS WE USE

- **Salient:** characteristics that attract our attention when we see something or someone with them
  - Example: things that are unusual, negative, colorful, bright, or moving
- We are more likely to judge based on sex, race, age, and physical attractiveness in part because these features are so salient when we see them
- Another thing that makes something particularly salient is its infrequency or unusualness
- The salience of the stimuli in our social worlds may sometimes lead us to make judgements on the basis of information that is actually less informative than is other less salient information

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SALIENCE AND ACCESSIBILITY DETERMINE WHICH EXPECTATIONS WE USE (CONTINUED)

- **Base rates**: the likelihood that events occur across a large population
- **Representativeness heuristic**: the tendency to base our judgments on information that seems to represent, or match, what we expect will happen while ignoring more informative base-rate information
- **Cognitive accessibility**: the extent to which an attitude or schema is activated in memory and thus likely to be used in information processing
- **Availability heuristic**: the tendency to make judgments of the frequency or likelihood that an event occurs on the basis of the ease with which examples of the event can be retrieved from memory
- **Processing fluency**: the ease with which we can process information in our environments

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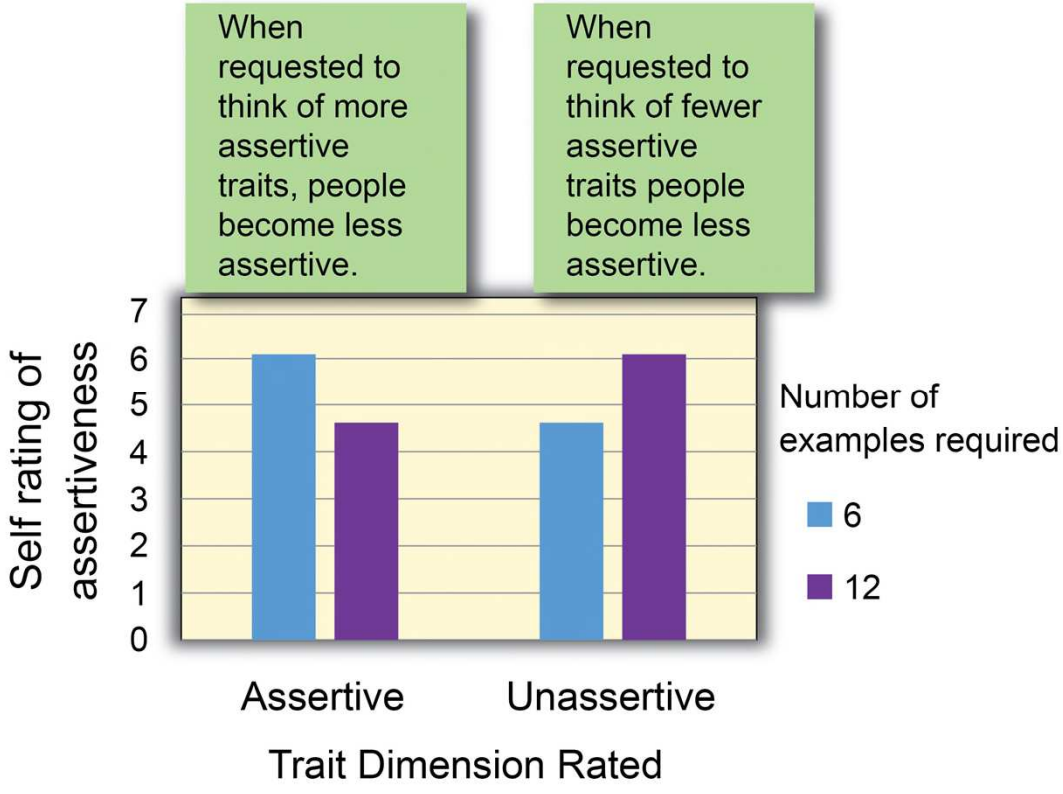
FIGURE 2.5 PROCESSING FLUENCY



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THE FALSE CONSENSUS BIAS

- **False consensus bias:** the tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people are similar to us
  - It is not usually observed on judgments of positive personal traits that we highly value as important

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COUNTERFACTUAL THINKING

- **Counterfactual thinking:** the tendency to think about events according to "what might have been"
  - The accessibility of the potential alternative outcome leads to some very paradoxical effects
  - If we can easily imagine an outcome that is better than what actually happened, then we may experience sadness and disappointment
  - If we can easily imagine that a result might have been worse than what actually happened, we may be more likely to experience happiness and satisfaction

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ANCHORING AND ADJUSTMENT

- **Anchoring and adjustment:** the tendency to weight an initial construct too heavily, insufficiently moving our judgment away from it

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OVERCONFIDENCE

- Being overconfident in our own skills, abilities, and judgements has powerful and negative effects on our judgments

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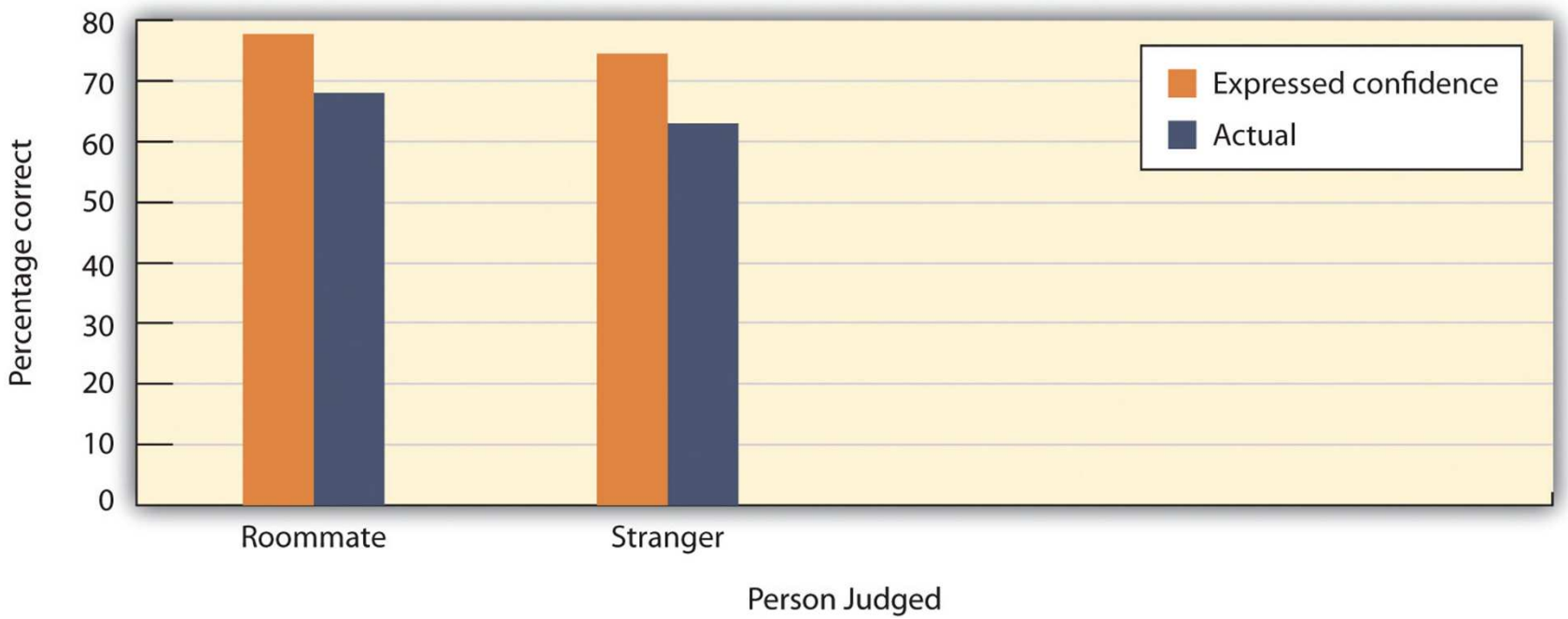
FIGURE 2.6 OVERCONFIDENCE



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THE IMPORTANCE OF COGNITIVE BIASES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

- If the errors occur for a lot of people, they can really add up
- People may take more care to prepare for unlikely events than for more likely ones, because the unlikely ones are more salient or accessible
- Salience and accessibility also color how we perceive our social worlds, which may have a big influence on our behavior
- Biases are not impossible to control, and psychologists and other scientists are working to help people make better decisions

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TABLE 2.2 COGNITIVE ERRORS

Cognitive Process	Description	Example
Representativeness heuristic	We tend to make judgments according to how well the event matches our expectations.	After a coin has come up heads many times in a row, we may erroneously think that the next flip is more likely to be tails.
Availability heuristic	Things that come to mind easily tend to be seen as more common.	We may overestimate the crime statistics in our own area because these crimes are so easy to recall.
Anchoring and adjustment	Although we try to adjust our judgments away from them, our decisions are overly based on the things that are most highly accessible in memory.	We may buy more of a product when it is advertised in bulk than when it is advertised as a single item.
Counterfactual thinking	We may "replay" events such that they turn out differently—especially when only minor changes in the events leading up to them make a difference.	We may feel particularly bad about events that might not have occurred if only a small change might have prevented them.
False consensus bias	We tend to see other people as similar to us.	We are surprised when other people have different political opinions or values.
Overconfidence	We tend to have more confidence in our skills, abilities, and judgments than is objectively warranted.	Eyewitnesses are often extremely confident that their identifications are accurate, even when they are not.

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