

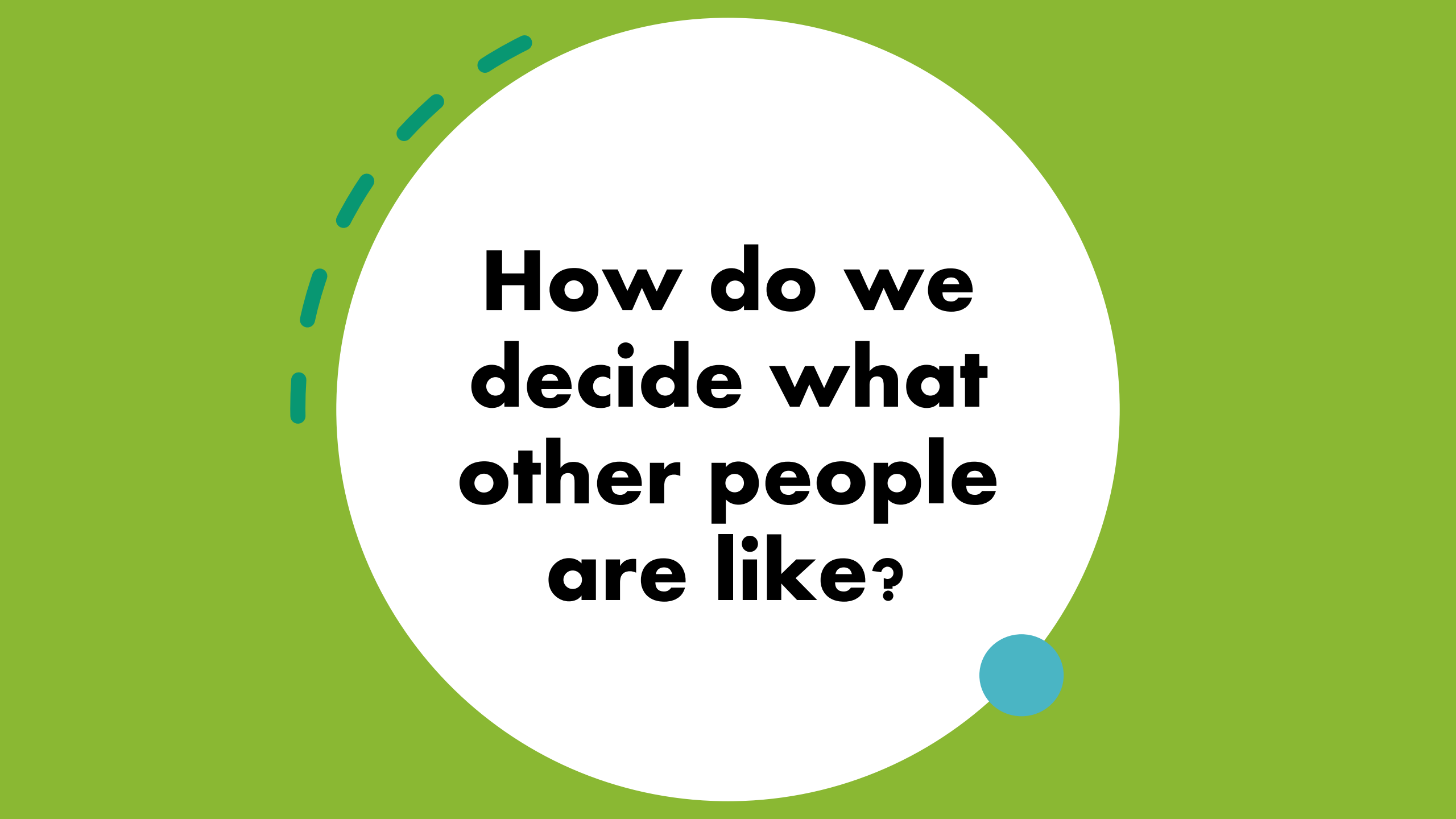
Social Psychology

Lesson 3: Social Perception

Lecturer: Maria Heidi P. Arconado

Expected Learning Outcomes:

- 1 Explain how initial information carries more weight than later information in social settings.
- 2 Articulate original, real-world scenarios that demonstrate the mechanics of social judgment, specifically focusing on the primacy and recency effects, the 'what-is-beautiful-is-good' stereotype, the halo effect, belief perseverance, and the self-fulfilling prophecy.
- 3 Analyze how the illusion of control, negativity bias, optimistic bias and counterfactual thinking can distort our perception of reality.
- 4 Explain how current emotions shape the recall of past experiences.



**How do we
decide what
other people
are like?**

Primacy effect

- The phenomenon whereby the first pieces of information to which we are exposed have the most impact on our judgments.
- Is there a difference?

- A. *John is intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious.*
- B. *John is envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent.*

Primacy effect

- In political polls and in primary election voting, candidates benefit from being listed first on the ballot. The effect is most pronounced in primary elections or non-partisan contests where voters may not have strong party cues to guide their decision. In these cases, being listed first can provide a statistically significant boost (Moore, 2004).
- Filipino politicians also take advantage of the primacy effect. Since the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) typically lists candidates alphabetically by surname, many politicians have historically used aliases or legally changed their names to start with "A."

Recency effect

- The phenomenon whereby the last pieces of information to which we are exposed have heightened impact on our judgments

“John is envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent.”

Recency effect

The Recency Effect is most powerful when:

- 1 There is a delay between the first set of information and the last set
- 2 You have to make a decision immediately after the last bit of info.

Halo effect

- When one positive thing is known or believed about a person, we tend to infer that the individual is positive overall and thus has other positive features

Halo effect

Nisbett and Wilson (1977) demonstration of Halo Effect:

- Researchers showed two groups of college students different videos of the same French professor:
 - Video 1: The professor acted warm and flexible.
 - Video 2: The professor was cold and rigid.

**The professor's physical appearance, accent, and mannerisms were identical in both clips.
- **Result:**
 - Students who saw the "pleasant" version rated the professor's physical appearance, mannerisms, and accent as attractive and appealing.
 - The students who saw the "unpleasant" version rated the exact same physical traits and accent as irritating or unattractive.

What-is-Beautiful-is-Good Effect

- The term was proposed by Karen Dion, Ellen Berscheid, and Elaine Walster in 1972.
- Formally known as the Physical Attractiveness Stereotype
- The phenomenon wherein beautiful things are imbued with positivity and activate positive things in the mind.
- In this cognitive bias, individuals subconsciously attribute positive personality traits and abilities to people who are physically attractive.
- Example: The belief that physical beauty is also equated to moral and intellectual excellence, assuming attractive people are also smarter, kinder, more competent, and more honest, even when we have no evidence to support those claims.

Belief Perseverance

- Holding on to one's beliefs, even in the face of contradictory evidence.

Belief Perseverance

Research by Anderson et al. (1980)

- Participants judged if risk-takers or cautious people made better firefighters using provided case studies.
- One group was told risk-takers are better; the other was told cautious people are better.
- Participants wrote down reasons to support their assigned view (e.g., risk-takers are "brave" or cautious people are "safer").
- Researchers eventually admitted the information was fake and there was actually no evidence provided.
- Despite the original information being completely discredited, the participants held to their self-generated explanations and therefore continued to believe that risk-prone people really do make better (or worse) firefighters.

Self-fulfilling prophecy

- Coined by Robert Merton in 1948
- A belief that leads to its own fulfillment.
- If we expect that something will happen, we will act in ways that elicit exactly what we expected.

You fear
being
rejected by
your date



When you
go on the
date, you
act
unpleasant
or quiet,
making easy
conversatio
n difficult.



Maybe
you're just
shy and
nervous, but
your date
thinks
you're aloof
and rude.



Your date
rejects you,
and your
fear comes
true.

Pygmalion Effect

- Proposed by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in 1968
- Experiment on Pygmalion effect:
- Researchers gave students a standard IQ test but lied to the teachers about the results.
- They claimed the test identified "academic bloomers"
- In reality the "bloomers" were actually chosen at random.
- There was no real difference between the students;
the only thing that changed was the teachers' expectations.

Pygmalion Effect

- **Result:** When the students were re-tested at the end of the school year, the "bloomer" group showed significantly higher gains in IQ scores compared to the other children.
- **Why is that?** Because the teachers believed these specific children were smarter, they started treating them differently without even realizing it.



**BIAS IN
SOCIAL
COGNITION**

Illusion of Control

- coined by Ellen Langer in 1975
- The perception that uncontrollable events are somehow controllable and that one can influence events that actually depend upon chance.
- seen in gambling behaviors

Illusion of Control

- Langer (1975) conducted an experiment where office workers were sold \$1 lottery tickets; half of the participants were allowed to choose their own ticket, while the other half were simply assigned one by the researcher.
- When researchers offered to buy the tickets back, the people who picked their own numbers demanded significantly more money (over four times more) compared to those who were assigned numbers

Illusion of Control

- Langer (1975) examined how the appearance of a competitor influences risk-taking in games of pure chance by having participants play a card-cutting game against a "confederate" actor.
- The researcher used two different types of opponents to see how people would react:
 - Confederate 1: looked sharp and acted confident
 - Confederate 2: looked messy and acted nervous and awkward
- Participants consistently bet significantly more money when facing the awkward opponent than they did against the confident one.

Illusion of Control

- Wohl & Enzle (2002) found that when people are allowed to throw the dice or spin the wheel themselves, they report a higher expectation of winning.
- They feel as though their "personal luck" or "touch" can influence the outcome.

Negativity Bias

- coined and popularized by psychologists Paul Rozin and Edward Royzman in 2001
- The tendency for people to be more sensitive to and more likely to notice and remember negative information than positive information.

Negativity Bias

- Researchers measured the electrical activity in people's brain when they viewed positive photos, neutral photos and negative photos.
- **Result:** larger brain waves, reflecting a dramatic increase in brain activity, were observed when participants viewed the negative photos as opposed to when they viewed the positive or neutral photos.

Is there any value to focusing on the negative?

- From an evolutionary perspective, focusing on bad can be a life-saving tool.
- If we are wired to protect ourselves from danger, it follows that we would pay more attention to potential warning signs than to positive information.

Optimistic Bias

- Also known as “unrealistic optimism”
- coined by psychologist Neil Weinstein in 1980
- The belief that you are less likely than others to experience negative events and more likely to experience positive ones

Optimistic Bias

Research:

- Weinstein (1980) asked college students to compare their own chances of experiencing various life events with the chances of their peers.
- He found that participants consistently assumed that they were much more likely than the average person to land a high-paying job or buy a nice house.
- Conversely, they viewed themselves as significantly less likely than their classmates to encounter negative events like divorce, accidents, or illness.

Counterfactual thinking

- The tendency to imagine alternative scenarios and outcomes that might have happened but didn't.
- Bereaved people who have lost a spouse or a child in a vehicle accident, or a child to sudden infant death syndrome, commonly report replaying and undoing the event (Davis et al., 1995).

“I should have told my father I loved him before he died”

“I wish I had been more serious in college”

Upward counterfactual

- The tendency to imagine better outcome.
- Score on exam: 95% vs. 89%
Getting 89% could end up feeling pretty bad about your performance because you're comparing your reality to a perfect version in your head.
- Score on exam: 75% vs. 79%
79% is technically the better score, but it feels much worse because the "what if" scenario is so much easier to visualize
- Olympic medalist: Silver medalists → less happy because they are "losing the gold"

Downward counterfactual

- The tendency to imagine worse outcome.
- Scoring 75% on an exam → "If I had missed just one or two more questions, I would have failed the exam."
- Olympic medalist: Bronze medalists → they are happier because they are "winning a spot on the podium"



**EFFECT OF
MOOD ON
COGNITION**

Mood Congruence Effect

- We are more likely to remember positive information when in positive mood, and negative information when in negative mood.

Positive mood

- makes you tend to think more expansively and creatively
- you become more open to new ideas, better at seeing the "big picture," and more likely to find connections between unrelated concepts.
- Makes you feel free to take risks and give others the benefit of the doubt.

Negative mood

- narrows your focus
- making your thinking more detail-oriented, cautious, and sometimes overly critical
- This can also lead to becoming stuck on minor flaws

Mood Dependent Memory

- This refers to the fact that what we remember when in a given mood is influenced in part by what was learned when previously in that mood.

“If you are calm when you study, you’re more likely to recall the information you studied when you’re feeling calm.”

“If you are a person who gets nervous when you take a test, you might actually remember more of the test material if you study when you’re feeling nervous.”

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