Lecture 3 – Understanding ourselves and the group

All information, assignments, articles and hand-outs will be posted to course website. Visit it regularly!
http://www.lucs.lu.se/education/extf76/

Understanding the group

When we try to understand other people, we use our Theory of Mind and our background knowledge to make interpretations – we never directly observe what goes on in other people’s heads. As this is an act of interpretation, we are bound to make mistakes. Some of these mistakes we make more often than others. A few important examples:

- **The spotlight effect**
  - People believe they are noticed much more than they actually are.

- **The false consensus effect**
  - People believe that their own views are shared by the majority (or a large proportion) of other people, that their own beliefs, preferences, opinions and choices are what is considered normal within a defined group.

- **The fundamental attribution error**
  - The tendency to overlook situational factors when explaining other people’s behavior.

- **The halo and the horn effect**
  - The tendency to let our evaluation of one aspect of a person influence how we perceive other aspects of that person. The most common example is how we think that attractive people are smarter, funnier, more reliable, etc.

Understanding ourselves

When we understand or try to explain ourselves, we often do this in ways similar to how we understand other people. We make interpretations, and we use all the evidence we can find. A few important examples

- **Emotional attribution**
  - We misattribute physical arousal to be indicative of an emotional reaction
    - Example: adrenaline increase from one situation (e.g. standing on a high bridge) is interpreted as being due to the attractiveness of a person you meet
    - Example: interpreting feedback from your heartbeat to infer how scared you are of a stimuli, like a snake
  - We are influenced by our own actions and reactions
    - Example: holding a pen in your mouth forcing a smile makes you happier
Self-interpretation of attitudes

- Example: large reward for performing a task lessens intrinsic motivation. Leads to: “I did it because of the money, not because I enjoyed it”.
- Example: Choice blindness. People often infer what they like from what they think they have liked previously. When asked why a choice was made, a story is constructed to fit the outcome of a choice, rather than describing the actual processes that led to the choice.

Preference construction

Preferences are often constructed in the moment of choice. The memory of a previous choice then influence future choices, which leads to stability in behavior.

It is useful to think about people’s self-knowledge as them applying the Intentional Stance towards themselves. We often understand ourselves using the same mechanisms as those we use when understanding others.

The primary mistake we make when interpreting ourselves is that we think we know, and that we should know, all the things that goes on in our own minds. This is clearly not the case.

References used in the lecture: