Lecture 12

Unconscious Thinking

• The Basic Idea
  • Two modes of thinking run concurrently
• Decision-Making
  • When to consciously think and when not to
• Problem Solving
  • When to reason, when to not
• Mood Regulation
  • The benefit of “distracting” conscious thinking
The Basic Idea

From *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*
The “Dual-Process” Model

Two “parallel” modes of thinking/reasoning

Unconscious or implicit
This system can also make decisions and affect behavior, but we’re typically unaware of the process/reasoning. We only “know” the decision or behavior once it’s made or happens.

Conscious or explicit
This is the system Associated with normal, Conscious awareness, Our decision-making, And the reasoning Behind our behaviors.
Decisions and Thinking

Why can thinking reduce decision happiness?

From The Office
Decisions and Thinking

“Most desirable car”

Attributes

- Good/Bad mileage
- Good/bad handling
- Large/small trunk
- Old/new
- Many/few color options
- Service good/bad
- Good/bad legroom
- Easy/hard to shift
- Cupholders/no cupholders
- Sunroof/no sunroof
- Good/bad for environment
- Good/bad sound system

Dijksterhuis (2006)
Decisions and Thinking

<table>
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<th>Mode of Thought</th>
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Dijksterhuis (2006)
Fig. 1. Percentage of participants who chose the most desirable car as a function of complexity of decision and of mode of thought (n = 18 to 22 in each condition). Error bars represent the standard error.

Dijksterhuis (2006)
Decisions and Thinking

Experiment 3

Fig. 3. The relation between mode of thought and postchoice satisfaction (on a scale of 1 to 7) for the six products most frequently chosen in study 3. Higher bars indicate more satisfaction. The more complex the product (on a scale of 1 to 5), the further to the right it is shown. The complexity score is given in parentheses. Participants were divided into conscious and unconscious thinkers on the basis of a median-split for each product individually. Each bar represents between two and five participants.

Happier when thinking

Dijksterhuis (2006)

Happier when not thinking
Decisions and Thinking

Experiment 4

Buying “Simple” Things

Buying “complex” Things

Asked customers about how much thinking before purchase
And then 2-3 weeks later, asked about satisfaction

Dijksterhuis (2006)
Fig. 4. Postchoice satisfaction of IKEA (n = 27) and Bijenkorf (n = 27) shoppers as a function of mode of thought. Error bars represent the standard error.

Dijksterhuis (2006)
Problem Solving

A “reasoning” problem

2. Three cards from an ordinary deck are lying on a table, face down. The following information (for some peculiar reason) is known about those three cards (all the information below refers to the same three cards):

• To the left of a queen there is a jack
• To the left of a spade there is a diamond
• To the right of a heart there is a king
• To the right of a king there is a spade

Can you assign the proper suit to each picture card?

Schooler (1993)
Problem Solving

An “insight” problem

Schooler (1993)
Problem Solving

Another “Insight” problem

Schooler (1993)
When participants didn’t explicitly “verbalize” during problem solving, performance was relatively high on the “insight” problems.

When participants were actively encouraged to “verbalize” during problem solving, performance on the “insight” problems dropped.

Schooler (1993)
To what extent does conscious thinking perpetuate bad moods?

Nolen-Hoeksema (1998)
Mood Regulation

Two things affecting negative moods

Self-Focused Rumination

- Thoughts and behaviors that focus attention on the negative mood, the causes/consequences of the mood, and self-evaluation related to the mood

Distraction

Focusing one’s attention away from the mood and its causes/consequences, and instead focusing on positive/neutral things that are sufficiently engaging so as to prevent the mind wandering back to the negative mood

Nolen-Hoeksema (1998)
Mood Regulation

Self-focused rumination vs. distraction

Anger induction. In order to induce an angry mood, we had participants read a story that vividly described a situation in which a teaching assistant repeatedly mistreats a student by giving unfair grades with no justification, refusing to discuss reasons for the bad grades, and embarrassing the student in class (adapted from Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993). Participants were instructed to imagine that the events described in the story were happening to them. This induction procedure has been shown to induce a specific state of anger with considerable effectiveness, while not inducing other negative mood states (Keltner et al., 1993). The induction task consisted of five paragraphs, each describing the next part of the story. Participants were given exactly 2 min to read and imagine the events in each paragraph, yielding a total of 10 min spent imagining the anger-provoking events in the story.

Nolen-Hoeksema (1998)
Participants’ level of anger was measured before and after the anger induction manipulation, and as a function of whether they were instructed to ruminate on their anger or think about clouds (the “distraction” condition). Participants were significantly less angry in this latter condition.