

the benefit of having an oesophagus that facilitates spoken communication; however, the latter risk does not seem to be offset by any particular benefit. True, at some level of abstraction, an inflamed appendix might be construed as part of an otherwise well-adapted food-digesting organism; however, to assert as much is vague and unsatisfying. The same goes for the assertion that a cognitive bias is part of an otherwise well-adapted mind. Might it not be that some cognitive biases are just unmitigated evils, forms of acute mental appendicitis?

The wrong standard: Science, not politics, needed

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Abstract: Krueger & Funder (K&F) focus on an important problem, but they offer a political rather than a scientific remedy. “Balance” is not our problem; systematic, scientific research is. Only that sort of research will ever lead social psychology out of its current malaise that focuses on positive and negative aspects of human behavior.

I find the lopsided character of social psychology no less offensive than Kreuger & Funder (K&F) do, and I appreciate their scholarly effort to turn things around. Nevertheless, it appears to me to miss the central target, namely, the unsystematic, nonscientific nature of social psychology today. The authors’ remedy applies the wrong standard; it is not merely a question of *balance*, but creating more research that demonstrates the positive capacities of *Homo sapiens*, thus providing roughly equal numbers of positive and negative conclusions regarding the moral and cognitive attributes of this creature. That’s a *political* criterion; there is no scientific or naturalistic reason for the necessity of a balance. We shouldn’t expect research to be guided by a search for a point of equilibrium where positive findings match negative ones. It is not mere imbalance that ails social psychology, rather, it is the lack of a *scientific* approach to its subject matter. As the authors’ note, at present the field lacks the cumulative character of a serious scientific discipline, and that is where the trouble lies. All this was hashed over a few decades ago when the viability of social psychology as a discipline came under serious scrutiny. But it survived, rescued apparently, at least in part, by the excitement generated by all that negative research that threw the field out of “balance.”

But suppose the authors get their wish, and suppose we are indeed presented with a new series of positive findings that reverse our contemporary views. Might that not lead to new questions, such as: Is social psychology merely self-referential – consumed with internal political squabbles of little interest to the broader scientific community? Does social psychology merely cycle between producing positive features and negative features? First, a lot of this, and then, a lot of that? And if that’s all that the search for balance gives us, we may well ask: Will social psychology *ever* produce systematic scientific work?

The authors recognize this current danger. Their “central recommendation is that empirical work and theoretical modeling address the whole range of performance” (target article, sect. 4.3.1). So they undoubtedly see the point of a systematic scientific approach. Their theoretical suggestions are given with the aim of producing “balance,” however, thus diverting their readers, and failing to lead beyond social psychology’s internal problems.

As it happens, social psychology did have its systematists who, regrettably, today only a few will remember, or will have encountered. And they were systematists who knew what they were doing, whose contribution to systematic analysis consisted of more than a brave turn of phrase. A half century ago, David Krech and Richard Crutchfield gave us an excellent start with their *Theory and Problems of Social Psychology* (1948), a book that was intended to provide – and did provide – the systematic approach so-

cial psychology needed then, and desperately needs now, and which is called for by K&F. The first sentence of Krech and Crutchfield’s Preface made their goals clear: “This book is designed for the teacher and the student who are interested in the *science* of psychology as a systematic, interpretative account of human behavior (Krech & Crutchfield 1948, p. vii, emphasis in original).

But a half century later, all we can say is that, despite the excellence of the effort, it did not succeed. We don’t know why it didn’t; we now have a scattered, incoherent discipline, filled with disconnected studies. Nevertheless, the effort by Krech and Crutchfield was useful, for it allows us to contemplate the fact that, a half century later, we do not have what is wanted. Perhaps we should simply conclude that, although our sympathies lie with K&F – they are asking many of the right questions – their standard is incorrect; they believe that *balancing* our research will improve matters. But, as I indicated above, that is conceptually mistaken, and now we can see that a half century of empirical evidence also goes against the value of their standard. It appears that social psychology is a discipline that has stumbled onto a series of interesting phenomena that, so far, elude systematic scientific inquiry. But such phenomena will *always* elude systematic scientific inquiry, *as long as we categorize them as we do now*.

Of course, it is easy to call for a new organization of the materials of a discipline, or semidiscipline, but providing that organization is an endeavor that will not be easy, and thus, it is an endeavor this commentator will hastily abjure. (But see Hammond & Stewart 2001, for an even more grandiose attempt.)

So, if we are to achieve a systematic approach, as Krech and Crutchfield did in fact achieve, the reader will have to figure out his or her own new concepts and categories of phenomena that will lead, not merely to a balance, but to a new scientific discipline, which may or may not be called “social psychology.” And that is what the reader should be doing; rethinking the concepts and categories that define and guide the social psychology of today, with the aim of developing new ones, rather than conducting research that will restore an unnecessary balance.

Beyond balance: To understand “bias,” social psychology needs to address issues of politics, power, and social perspective

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Abstract: Krueger & Funder’s (K&F’s) diagnosis of social psychology’s obsession with bias is correct and accords with similar observations by self-categorization theorists. However, the analysis of causes is incomplete and suggestions for cures are flawed. The primary problem is not imbalance, but a failure to acknowledge that social reality has different forms, depending on one’s social and political vantage point in relation to a specific social context.

There is much to like about Krueger & Funder’s (K&F’s) article. It takes a broad view of the discipline of social psychology and raises timely questions about metatheory and practice. Moreover, some of its more contentious observations are undoubtedly correct. Over the last 30 years, the cognitive branches of social psychology *have* become increasingly fixated on issues of bias, and research into some topics – most notably stereotyping and social judgement – has essentially been defined by the desire to catalogue “basic” cognitive deficits that can be held responsible for pernicious forms of social behaviour.

Like K&F (and Asch 1952; Sherif 1966, before them), we believe that the bias agenda is unproductive and has had a distorting impact on our discipline and on its analysis of social problems (and hence on the remedies it proposes). Indeed, in common with