

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

Kenneth R. Hammond

1740 Columbine Avenue, Boulder, CO 80302. krhammond@earthlink.net

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

S. Alexander Haslam, Tom Postmes, and Jolanda Jetten

School of Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4QG, United Kingdom. A.Haslam@exeter.ac.uk T.Postmes@exeter.ac.uk

J.Jetten@exeter.ac.uk <http://www.ex.ac.uk/Psychology/seorg/>

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

other self-categorization theorists (e.g., Turner et al. 1994), this belief has informed most of our research for the last twenty years. Accordingly, it was used as a basis for critiquing the large body of social cognitive research into stereotyping and for developing and testing an alternative metatheoretical perspective. This argues that stereotyping and related group processes are not the product of cognitive bias or collective irrationality, but of adaptive sense-making processes which serve: (a) to represent important social realities from the perspective of membership in particular social groups, and (b) to allow those groups to engage in meaningful forms of social action.

An example is provided by research into inter-category accentuation, that is, the tendency to represent distinct groups in black-and-white terms rather than shades of grey (e.g., Krueger & Rothbart 1990; Tajfel 1969). Haslam and Turner (1992; 1998) suggest that, rather than representing a distortion of the individual properties of stimuli, such accentuation serves to represent *veridically* their higher-order properties as members of social groups perceived from a particular vantage point. We argued that such judgments only appear distorted if one accepts the individualistic doctrine that the truth about people resides in their individuality, and if one privileges a single perspective (e.g., that of the researcher or “independent” judge) in one’s appraisal of accuracy. In contrast, self-categorization theorists argue that there are higher-order social realities and distinct social and political perspectives, which stereotypes and social judgments *need* to represent, if they are to allow the perceiver to function effectively in the social world (see Oakes et al. 1994; Spears et al. 1997). It is not hard, for example, to see why it would have been problematic – not just psychologically, but also *politically* – for Black South Africans in the Apartheid era to see all South Africans as individuals and to accept the “objective” judgments of the white judiciary, which sought to invalidate perceptions that were consonant with Black Consciousness. Haslam and Turner (1998) used the following court exchange involving the Black activist Steve Biko to illustrate this point:

Judge Boshoff: But now why do you refer to you people as blacks? Why not brown people? I mean you people are more brown than black.

Biko: In the same way as I think white people are more pink and yellow and pale than white.

[General laughter in the court]

Judge Boshoff: Quite . . . but now why do you not use the word brown then?

Biko: No, I think really, historically, we have been defined as black people, and when we reject the term non-white and take upon ourselves the right to call ourselves what we think we are, we have got available in front of us a whole number of alternatives, . . . and we choose this one precisely because we feel it is most accommodating. (Biko 1978/1988, p. 121)

In treating Biko as a fool, the judge here takes the line of most cognitive social psychologists in suggesting that accentuated judgment (seeing things as black-and-white rather than brown-and-pink) misrepresents reality by exaggerating its true nature. But, providing we share Biko’s political goals, we can see that it is the judge who is the fool.

Yet, while there are important points of contact between the work of self-categorization theorists and the arguments of K&F, we would note that there are still significant residual differences. Most pointedly, we do not believe that the bias agenda has arisen primarily as a result of social psychologists’ failure to survey a full range of behavioural responses, and hence, that it will be remedied by statistical or other strategies that attempt to correct for this limited sampling. Like social cognitivists, Judge Boshoff was not at fault because he did not have access to enough information of the right sort. Indeed, if he had had more information, it seems likely that (from our perspective) he would have interpreted that incorrectly, as well. Instead, then, the primary problem lies in his very limited interpretation of the data *that he already had access to*. And what is driving this? Problems of negative emphasis? Of non-Bayesian inference? Of lack of balance?

It is none of these. Rather, we can see that the limitations of the judge’s perspective were a direct reflection of his in-group’s ideology and political imperatives. Likewise, in social psychology, the bias agenda can be traced to ideological priorities which reify a particular definition of social reality – one which sees the truth about people (whether perceivers or perceived) as lying in their status as isolated individuals, rather than as members of functioning social groups who need to act in relation to a specific social context (Oakes et al. 2001; Turner & Oakes 1997).

Significantly too, it is apparent that in K&F’s own Utopian future they still retain the belief that there is a *single transcontextual reality*, which can be uncovered by appropriate statistical and behavioral testing. Psychologically, this conviction seems highly questionable. On political grounds, we are generally motivated to favour one version of social reality over another (i.e., ours) and to present this as *the* truth, but in order to do justice to social psychology, we need to understand that the social world is comprised of *multiple* realities. So, although as political agents we may favour Biko’s version of reality over Boshoff’s, in order to make progress as social psychologists we need to understand that, for the people and groups who endorse such worldviews, there are competing realities here. In short, the path to progress lies in an appreciation of the interplay between psychology and social context that creates these realities, rather than in attempting to achieve some artificial balance in a decontextualized psychology.

The same, incidentally, is true of classic studies of visual perception. To make sense of what happens in an Ames’ room, for example, we need to understand that the visual world *really is* different for participants and for detached observers. In research of this form, of course, there is no debate about which of these two worlds to privilege when labeling one set of perceptions “right” and the other “wrong,” and so we have no political difficulty achieving a “balanced” psychology of perception. But the social world typically isn’t like this – as members of different social groups we have different values, norms, ideologies, and cultures. In other words, we have different *social perspectives*. Moreover, as the history of social cognition research demonstrates, when the differences between these are downplayed, it is the values and perspective of more powerful groups that tend to be privileged in arbitrating over error and accuracy, and the balance between the two (Hopkins et al. 1997; Spears & Smith 2000).

So, as K&F suggest, let us celebrate social psychology as veridical and adaptive, rather than error-prone and error-ridden. But let us accept that this requires an appreciation of differences in social perspective and in associated psychological truths – as well as appreciation of the political and sociostructural reasons for these differences – rather than an a priori commitment to balance. If we do not, we suspect that social psychology will continue to lose its way in an array of baffling conundra and seemingly paradoxical phenomena, and will simply substitute one set of problems for another. For when the labels “truth” and “error” are attached to different phenomena by members of different groups, methodological criteria alone will never resolve the thorny questions of how much balance is enough, and who has the right to decide.

Out of the theoretical cul-de-sac

Ralph Hertwig and Annika Wallin

Center for Adaptive Behavior and Cognition, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, 14195 Berlin, Germany. hertwig@mpib-berlin.mpg.de
wallin@mpib-berlin.mpg.de

Abstract: A key premise of the heuristics-and-biases program is that heuristics are “quite useful.” Let us now pay more than lip service to this premise, and analyse the environmental structures that make heuristics more or less useful. Let us also strike from the long list of biases those phenomena that are not biases and explore to what degree those that remain are adaptive or can be understood as by-products of adaptive mechanisms.