

Political Schemas

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Psychology 335

Schemas

- Remember the central question for this course:
- *How do people understand politics and interpret political information and events?*
- Schemas: hypothesized knowledge structures
- Schemas affect inferences people make
- Types of schemas:
- Person/self/role/event/pragmatic

Abelson: scripts

- Story of John:
- What happened?
- What did he do first?
- What did he eat?
- Eating is an inference from the “restaurant script” that we carry with us
- Gap in the story is filled using the script

Schema Activation

- Influences memory [both storage/recall]—Bransford and Johnson (1972)
- The procedure is actually quite simple. First, you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do.... It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life.
- “Priming”—(Donald story)—has emotional consequences—Higgins, Rholes & Jones (1977)
- Simplification (Linville & Jones)
 - Outgroups seen as more homogeneous than ingroups
 - Less complex thinking about outgroups than ingroups

Milburn (1987)

- Ideological schemas
- Ideological self-schemas
- What was the hypothesis?
- What was the method?
- What variables were measured?
- Results?
- An interaction: More ideological consistency following activation of an ideological schema *for individuals who are ideologically self-schematic*

Milburn & Fay-Dumaine

- IVs:
- Same schema activation manipulation
- Ideological self-schemas
- DV:
- Results?
- Interaction: Complexity of reasoning simplified following schema activation *for those who were ideologically schematic*

Cognitive Heuristics

- Kahneman and Tversky
- E.g., Availability heuristic
- Cognitive shortcuts produce errors in probability estimation

Pragmatic Schemas

- P. 393—reasoning performance improved when cued what procedure to use
- Activation of pragmatic schema

Schematic Processing

- See Merelman article in packet:
 - Development of political thinking
 - Modification of stage theories (Piaget/Kohlberg)
 - Substitution vs. Terracing
- Schema activation
 - Simplification
 - or
 - Improved reasoning
- Georgoudi—situational cues affect complexity of attributions

Conclusions

- People vary in their capacity for complex reasoning (Tetlock, Rosenberg)
- As individuals develop cognitively, many develop the capacity to reason at a higher level
- But, lower levels of reasoning/thinking are terraced
- Schema activation can therefore activate higher levels of reasoning (e.g., Cheng and Holyoke) or lower levels (simplification)
- The mass media are an important source of schema activation

Why is complexity important?

- Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977)—Integrative complexity in international crises
- Analyzed complexity of speeches/diplomatic communications in a series of international crises

Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977)

	<u>CONFLICT</u>	<u>PEACEFUL RESOLUTION</u>	
<u>Early 20th Century</u>	<u>WW I (1914)</u>	<u>Morocco (1911)</u>	
England	2.58	5.16	
France	1.42	4.83	
Germany	1.84	3.92	
	(1950)	(1948)	(1962)
<u>Mid 20th Century</u>	<u>Korea</u>	<u>Berlin Airlift</u>	<u>Cuban Missile Crisis</u>
USA	1.75	3.00	4.75
USSR	1.67	2.50	4.67