

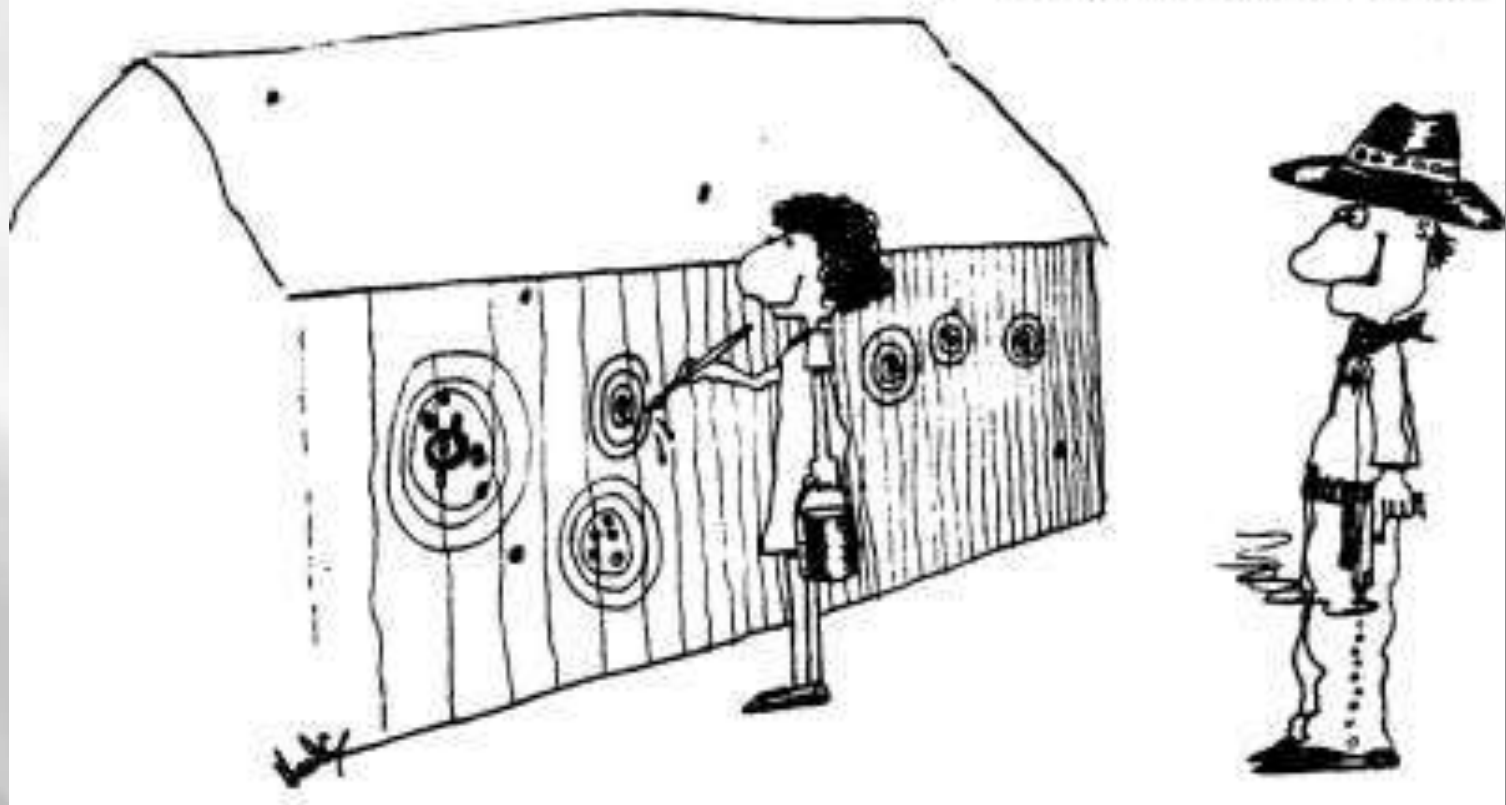
# Making sense of people

## What we think we know of ourselves and others



# **Decomposing bias in our beliefs**

# *The Texas Sharpshooter Procedure*



**But do we do this on purpose?**

# “Ah! I knew it all along!”



Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight ≠ foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 1, 288–299.

## Ratings of probability of ending: *Historical event (war)*

GROUP:	Probab. of Ending 1	Probab. of Ending 2	Probab. of Ending 3	Probab. of Ending 4
Ending not stated	33.8	21.3	32.3	13.4
Ending 1	57.2	14.3	15.3	10.5
Ending 2	30.3	38.4	20.4	10.5
Ending 3	25.7	17.0	48.0	9.9
Ending 4	33.0	15.8	24.3	27.0

# “Ah! I knew it all along!”



Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight ≠ foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 1, 288–299.

## Ratings of probability of ending: *Historical event (riot)*

GROUP:	Probab. of Ending 1	Probab. of Ending 2	Probab. of Ending 3	Probab. of Ending 4
Ending not stated	11.2	30.8	43.8	14.2
Ending 1	30.6	25.8	23.3	20.3
Ending 2	5.5	51.8	24.3	18.5
Ending 3	3.9	23.9	50.8	21.4
Ending 4	16.7	31.9	23.4	27.9

# “Ah! I knew it all along!”



Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight ≠ foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 1, 288–299.

## Ratings of probability of ending: *Therapy outcome 1*

GROUP:	Probab. of Ending 1	Probab. of Ending 2	Probab. of Ending 3	Probab. of Ending 4
Ending not stated	26.6	15.8	23.4	34.4
Ending 1	43.1	13.9	17.3	25.8
Ending 2	26.5	23.3	13.4	36.9
Ending 3	30.6	14.1	34.1	21.3
Ending 4	21.2	10.2	22.6	46.1

# “Ah! I knew it all along!”



Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight ≠ foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 1, 288–299.

## Ratings of probability of ending: *Therapy outcome 2*

GROUP:	Probab. of Ending 1	Probab. of Ending 2	Probab. of Ending 3	Probab. of Ending 4
Ending not stated	27.4	26.9	39.4	6.3
Ending 1	33.6	20.8	37.8	8.0
Ending 2	22.4	41.8	28.9	7.1
Ending 3	20.5	22.3	50.0	7.3
Ending 4	30.6	19.5	37.7	12.3



**I KNEW YOU WERE TROUBLE WHEN YOU  
WALKED IN...**

**NOPE. HINDSIGHT  
BIAS**





# “Ah! I knew it all along!”



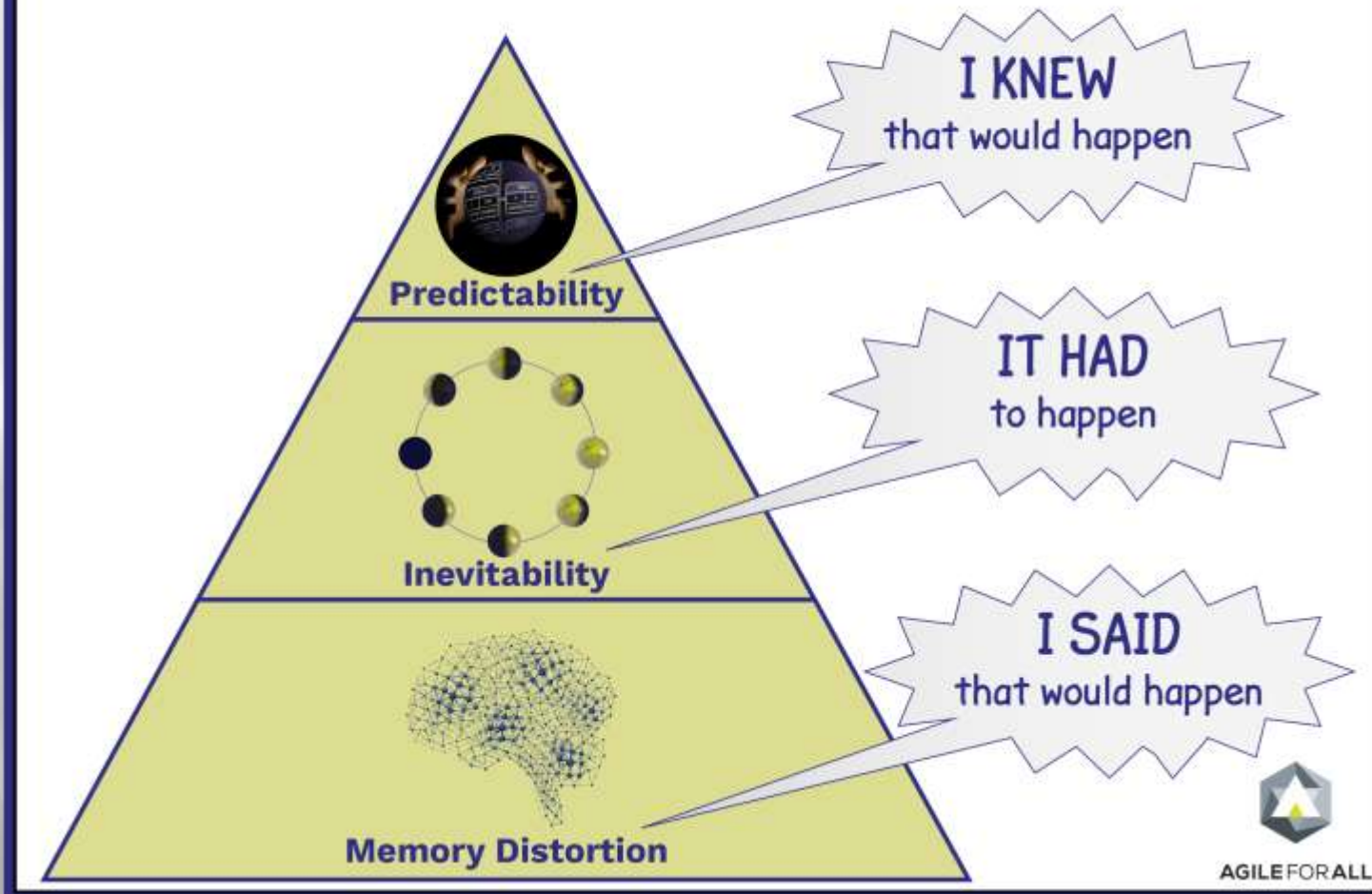
**Fischhoff also found that:**

- ▣ *The bias persisted when participants were told to ignore the actual ending or guess the estimate of a person who did not know the actual ending*
- ▣ **HINDSIGHT BIAS** = *tendency to perceive the already-known outcomes of an event as much more predictable than they really were + feeling that we have actually known it all along (or at least “had a hunch”)*

**What are the psychological mechanisms behind hindsight bias?**

# Possible components and explanations

## Three Levels of Hindsight Bias



**What are the positive and negative consequences of hindsight bias?**

**What do we know about  
ourselves and others?**

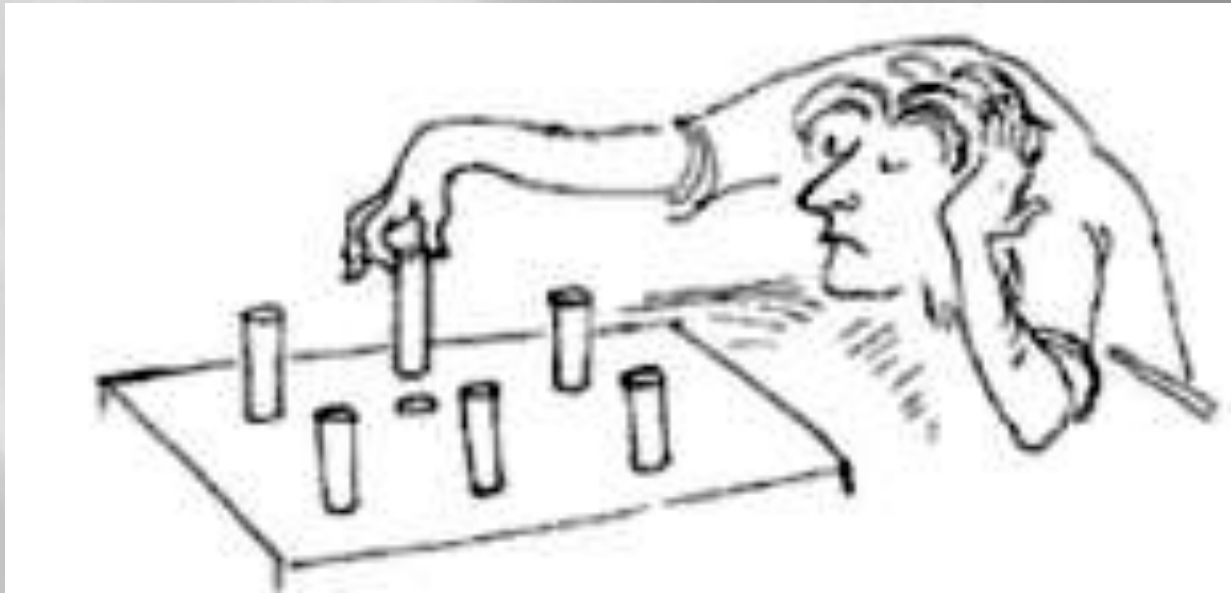
**What do we know about  
ourselves?**

**Are you sure about your beliefs,  
feelings, reasons why you do X or Y?**



# “Why am I doing this....?”

- ▣ **Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959**



# “Why am I doing this...?”

Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203-210.

## Group A:

- ▣ Asked to do a tedious task for more than 1 h
- ▣ Asked to do a „favour“ for the experimenter:
- ▣ Persuade next participant that the task was interesting
- ▣ **Paid \$ 20**




## Group B:

- ▣ Asked to do a tedious task for more than 1 h
- ▣ Asked to do a „favour“ for the experimenter:
- ▣ Persuade next participant that the task was interesting
- ▣ **Paid \$ 1**

# “Why am I doing this....?”

Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203-210.

## Ratings of task after payment:

	Enjoyable? Again?
Control Group	
\$ 20	
\$ 1	

**“Do you enjoy the party?”**



**“Do you enjoy the party?”**



**“Do you enjoy the party?”**





# “Was it worth it...?”

Aronson, E., & Mills, J. (1959). The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59(2), 177-181.

## Group A:

- ▣ Ready to join a discussion group
- ▣ Initiation: **Reading educational sex-related text**
- ▣ Asked to rate conversation of the group they joined



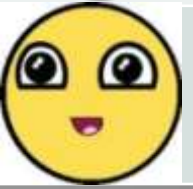
## Group B:

- ▣ Ready to join a discussion group
- ▣ Initiation: **Reading embarrassing pornographic text**
- ▣ Asked to rate conversation of the group they joined

# “Was it worth it...?”

Aronson, E., & Mills, J. (1959). The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59(2), 177-181.




## Ratings of recorded (boring) conversation:

	Interesting discussion?
Control Group	
Low embarrassment	
High embarrassment	

# “Why am I doing this....?”

Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203-210.

## Ratings of task after payment:

	Enjoyable? Again?
Control Group	
\$ 20	
\$ 1	

# Cognitive dissonance

- ▣ When our actions are in conflict (dissonance) with our beliefs, values, or primary motives we are inclined to change **either the belief or the behaviour**
- ▣ Which of these changes depends on **which one is easier to change** (e.g. we cannot change our past actions → we tend to change our belief)
- ▣ **Which other behaviours are difficult to change?**

# Cognitive dissonance

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- ▣ Which of these changes depends on **which one is easier to change** (e.g. we cannot change our past actions → we tend to change our belief)
- ▣ Other behaviours are difficult to change: bad habits, impulsive behaviour, conforming to group behaviour...

**What do we know about  
ourselves?**

**Do we know who we are?**



## IS THIS YOU?

- ▣ *You have a great need for other people to like and admire you.*
- ▣ *You have a tendency to be critical of yourself.*
- ▣ *You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage.*
- ▣ *While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them.*
- ▣ *Your sexual adjustment has presented problems for you.*
- ▣ *Disciplined and self-controlled outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside.*
- ▣ *At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.*

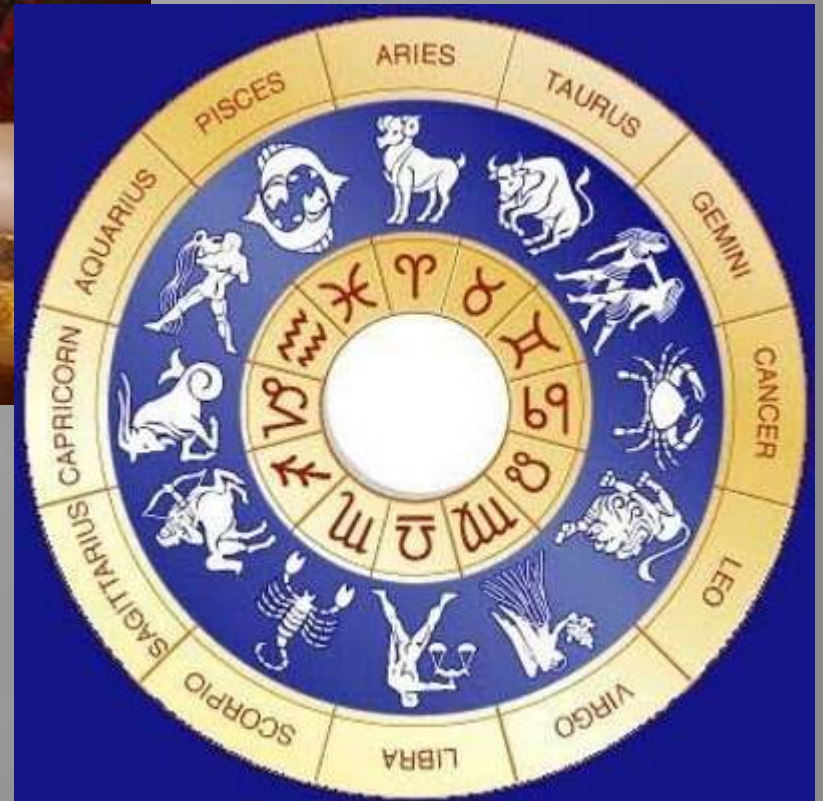
# “They know all about me!”

Forer, B. R. (1949). The fallacy of personal validation: A classroom demonstration of gullibility. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 44(1), 118-123.

Rating of profile accuracy	0	1	2	3	4	5
No. of subjects	-	-	1	4	18	16

- ▣ **The Forer effect / Barnum effect / personal validation fallacy** = *tendency to see highly universal statements that are true of most people as highly accurate and personalized descriptions of one's own personality*

# The Forer / Barnum Effect



# The Forer / Barnum Effect

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

- ▣ **Generality of interpretation** – *true of almost all people but allow “projection” of many different experiences that are unique*
- ▣ **Interpretation presented as personalized** – *people fail to think about the generality of statements when these are presented as personal descriptions of their personality*
- ▣ **Favourability** – *statements suggesting positive characteristics (care for others, sensitivity, “rich” and strong personality...) are more likely to be seen as accurate descriptions (generally accepted attributes of a good person)*
- ▣ **“Revelations”** – *may point to issues that are common to all people but are considered very private*

**Is using the Barnum effect  
always wrong?**

**What do we know about  
others?**

**Are we always fair judges of  
other people?**

**What are some of the  
common mistakes we make?**



**What do we know about  
others?**

**Do we know what motivates  
their actions?**

# Why do others do what they do?

Jones, E. E., & Harris, V. A. (1967). The attribution of attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 3(1), 1-24.

**Ratings of to what extent the author of the essay was himself a “pro-Castro”:**



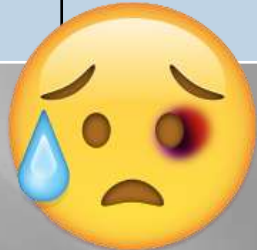

	Pro-Castro essay	Anti-Castro essay
Author could choose viewpoint	59.62	17.38
Author could not choose viewpoint	44.10	22.87

# Fundamental attribution error

- ▣ We tend to overestimate the causal impact of **stable characteristics** when evaluating other people's behaviour
- ▣ **WHY?**
- ▣ **Is this always the case?**

# Attribution error revisited

Later research and meta-analyses revealed a more complex pattern:

	ME	OTHER
Positive behaviours	 Trait	 Situation
Negative behaviours	 Situation	 Trait

**WHY?**

# Self-serving bias

**Self-serving bias** = *tendency to interpret situations in ways that protect or enhance one's self-esteem*



**Other things that bias our  
perception of others...**

# Is first impression important?





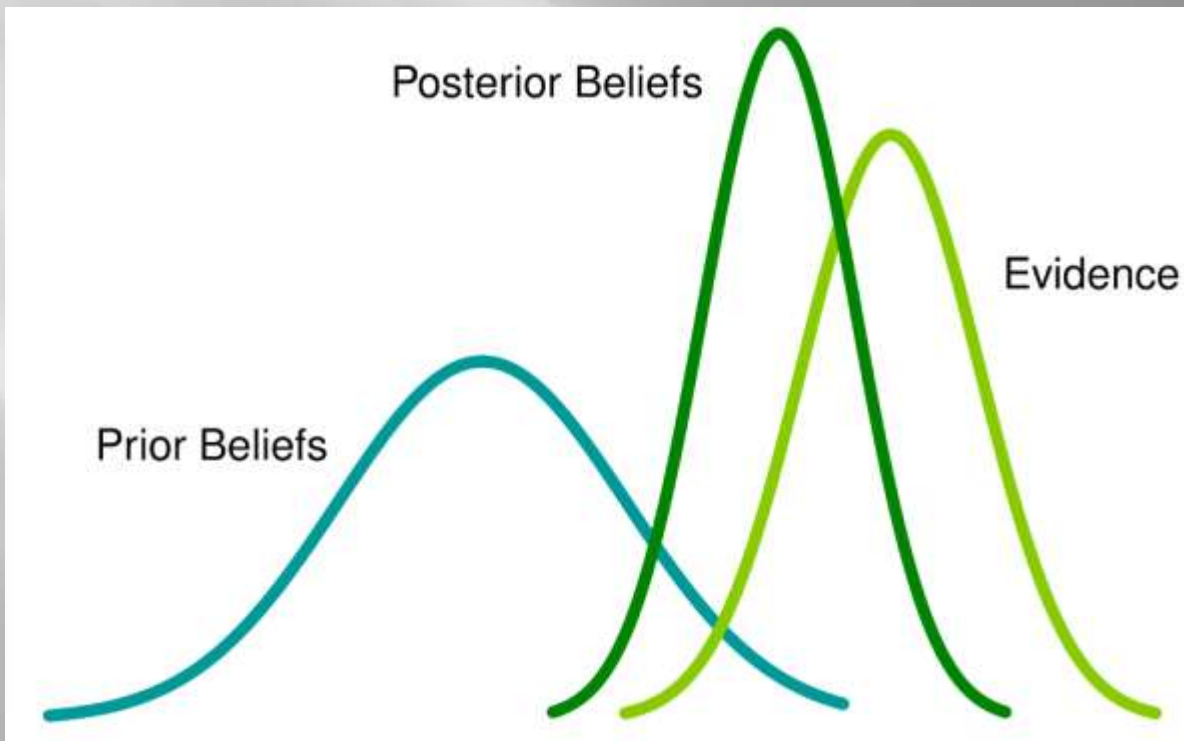
# The Halo Effect

= a tendency of our first impression of a person to “frame” our global impression of him/her in the future



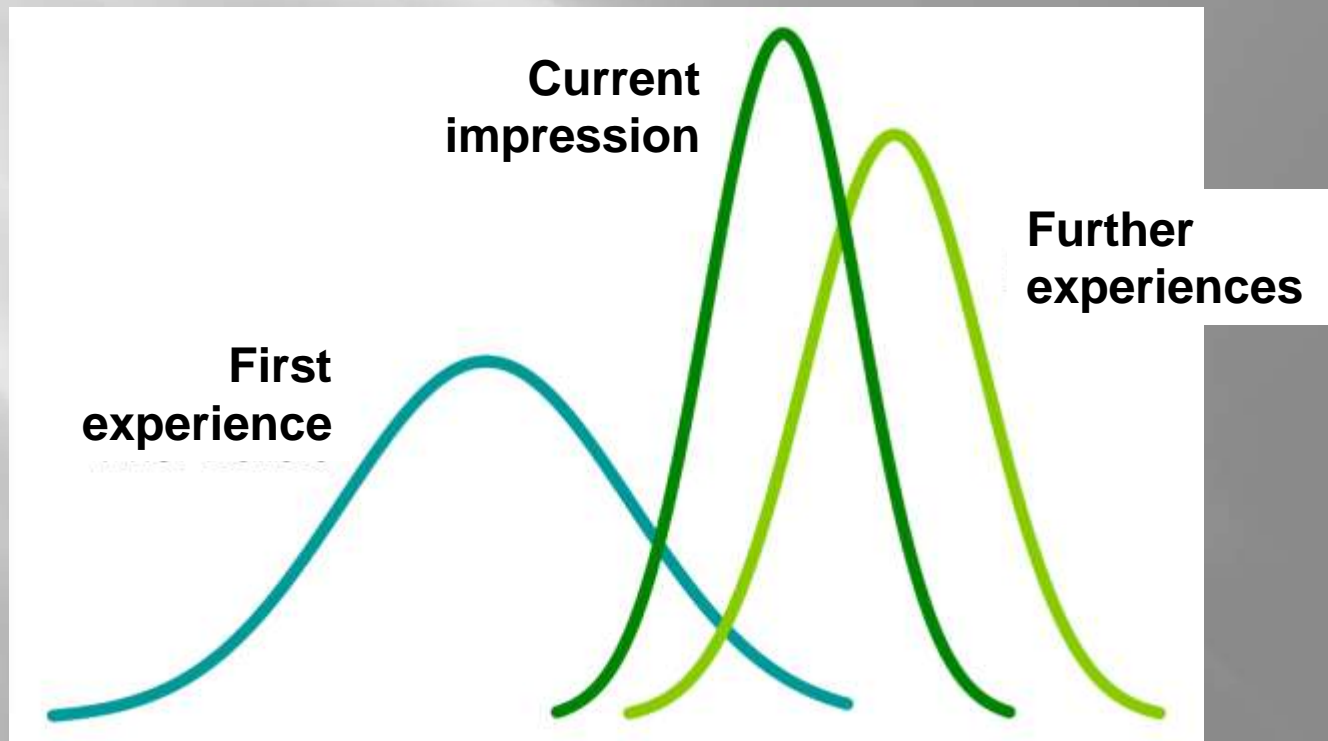
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# The Halo Effect

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). The halo effect: Evidence for unconscious alteration of judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(4), 250-256.

**Students asked to evaluate a new psychology instructor with French accent**

	Physical attractiveness	Mannerisms likeable	Accent likeable
Teacher presented as likeable	70%	60%	50%
Teacher presented as cold	30%	40%	30%

# The Halo Effect

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). The halo effect: Evidence for unconscious alteration of judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(4), 250-256.

**“Did the teacher’s behaviour influence your ratings of his physical attractiveness?”**

	Physical attractiveness	Mannerisms	Accent
Teacher presented as likeable	No	No	No
Teacher presented as cold	No	No	No

# The Halo Effect

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). The halo effect: Evidence for unconscious alteration of judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(4), 250-256.

**“Did the teacher’s attractiveness/mannerisms/accent influence your ratings of his behaviour?”**

	Physical attractiveness	Mannerisms	Accent
<b>Teacher presented as likeable</b>	<i>Not too much</i>	<i>Maybe a little, in a positive way</i>	<i>Might have</i>
<b>Teacher presented as cold</b>	<i>Yes, negatively</i>	<i>Yes, negatively</i>	<i>Yes, negatively</i>

# The Halo Effect

= people usually associate with physical attractiveness but it can also be the other way round!!! (*first impression of behaviour influences perceptions of physical attractiveness*)



**What do we know about  
others?**

**Do we know what other  
people think / prefer?**



*Do students prefer to go to sleep before or after midnight?*

# False consensus effect

Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The “false consensus effect”: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13(3), 279-301.

## % of people choosing Option 1 vs. Option 2

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 1	Option 2
<b>Situation 1 - Self</b>	<b>66</b>			<b>34</b>
Others - estimate	75.6	24.4	57.3	42.7
<b>Situation 2 - Self</b>	<b>80</b>			<b>20</b>
Others - estimate	67.4	32.6	45.9	54.1
<b>Situation 3 - Self</b>	<b>46</b>			<b>54</b>
Others - estimate	71.8	28.2	51.7	48.3
<b>Situation 4 - Self</b>	<b>40</b>			<b>60</b>
Others - estimate	47.9	52.1	39.0	61.0

# False consensus effect

Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The “false consensus effect”: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13(3), 279-301.

- ▣ Participants tended to **overestimate the extent to which other people share their opinions, decisions, habits, preferences, hobbies, fears, characteristics, etc.** (systematic differences in subjects choosing option A vs. option B by ca. 10% on average)
- ▣ The estimate of how much others will share their opinion was in most cases larger than the actual distribution in the group
- ▣ **Is this a problem? When?**

# Conclusions

- ▣ Our social perception and self-beliefs are influenced by specific universal biases
- ▣ Influenced ≠ determined!
- ▣ These biases may serve as heuristics – “just in case” judgments if information processing is limited
- ▣ Knowledge of biases helps us be more honest with ourselves, grow as people and treat others more fairly **BUT** it is much more difficult and can be stressful – requires high self-esteem, good self-regulatory mechanisms and general perception of control (“I can make up for my mistakes” / “I can do this better” / “I can change my behaviour” / “It’s OK that others are better at this” etc.) – **biases in social perception and self-perception may compensate for a lack of these in individuals who are mentally healthy**

# Conclusions

- ▣ Knowledge of biases helps us be more honest with ourselves, grow as people and treat others more fairly **BUT**

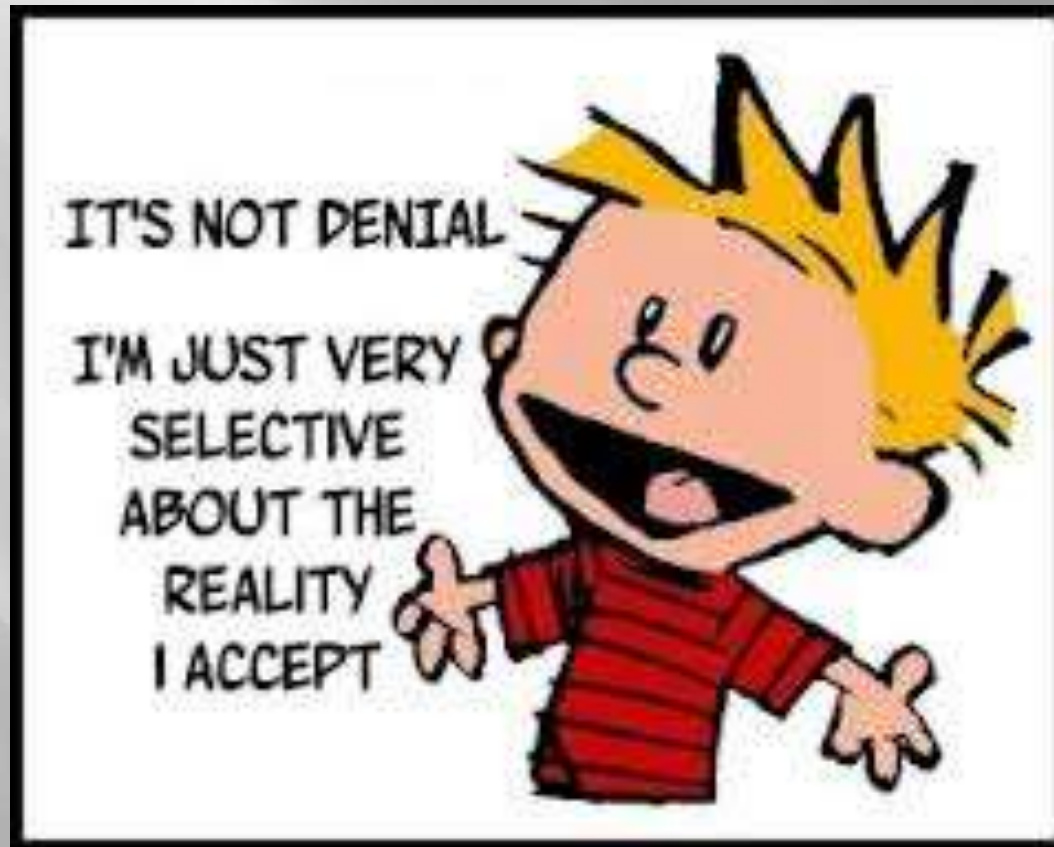
Before you decide you have anger management issues, make sure that you are not surrounded by assholes.



somee cards  
user card

**Mild optimistic and self-serving biases are normal in mentally healthy people.**

*That doesn't mean they're virtues.*





# Conclusions

## *Which one...?*

Before you decide you have anger management issues, make sure that you are not surrounded by assholes.



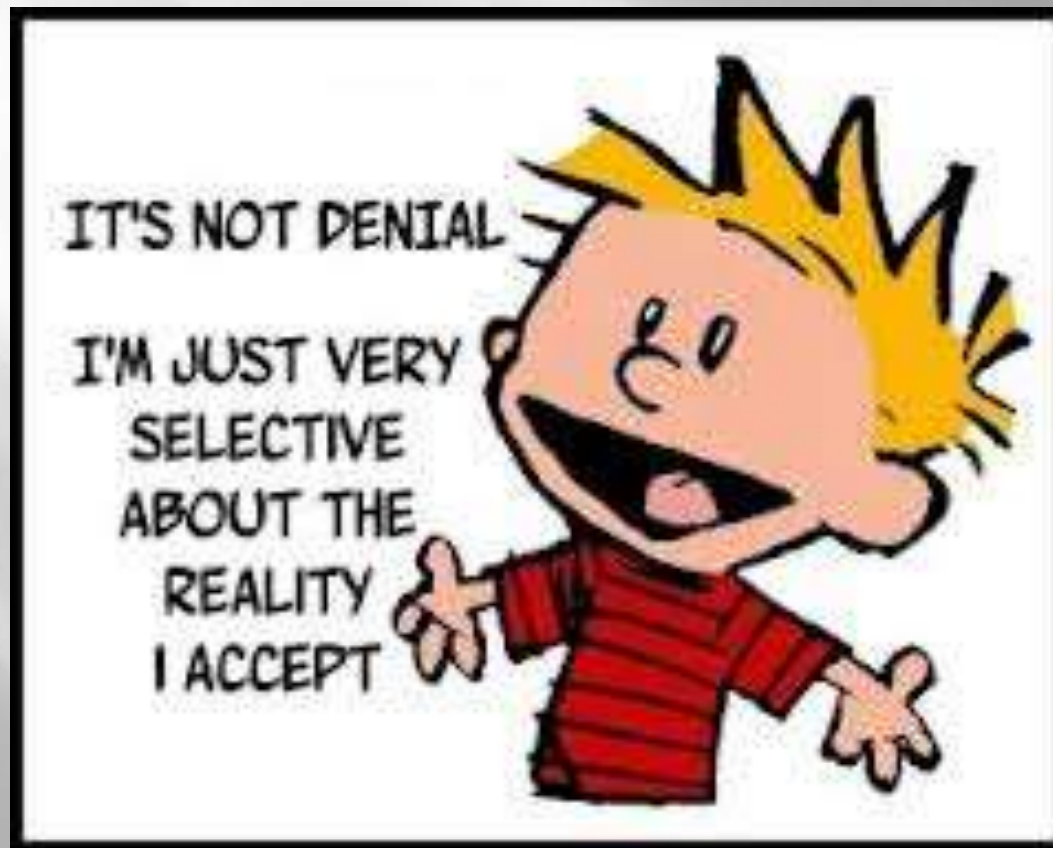
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When you think everything  
is someone else's fault,  
you will suffer a lot.

Dalai Lama



# What we think we know of ourselves and others



Thank you!