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Method

Participants

786 (68% female) participants completed the study in their undergraduate psychology tutorials; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.1$. Participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions.

Materials and Procedure

Need for Cognition Measure. Participants completed an 18 item version of the ‘Need for Cognition’ measure (Cacioppo, Petty & Kao, 1984, see Appendix A).

Reading. Participants were next shown an approximately 250 word page of text on one of three topics:

Awareness of rips : Consisted of a description of the importance of rips when swimming in Australia and what to do if caught in one. The passage was written by ChatGPT with the prompt: “Can you please write me an approximately 250 word explanation of the importance of being aware of rips on beaches in Australia. Please also include advice on what a person should do if they are caught in a rip. “

Fundamental attribution error: Consisted of a description of the concept from social psychology. This was written by ChatGPT with the prompt “can you please write me an approximately 250 word explanation of the fundamental attribution error”.

Personal circumstances prompt: A fictional passage designed to persuade, this was created by ChatGPT with the prompt: “Alby is a heroin addict who became addicted to heroin at a young age as a response to an impoverished and abusive upbringing. As an addict in his twenties he turns to non-violent crime such as break-ins and car theft to pay for his addiction. Can you please write an approximately 250 word piece attempting to persuade the reader that we should pay more attention to a person’s personal circumstances before judging them as a person.”

The arrow/next button did not appear until after one minute had elapsed to encourage participants to actually read the text and not skip it. See Appendix B for the complete passages.

Planetary explanations

Participants read brief descriptions of two ‘alien/hypothetical’ planets, and were asked to comment on what they thought were the reasons for the disparities. One explanation was an ‘inherent/internal’ type explanation, e.g. “Maybe the Blarks have a lot more money because the Blarks are smarter, or are better workers than the Orps are, or there’s something else about them that makes them get a lot of money.” The other explanation was an ‘extrinsic/external’ type explanation, e.g. “Maybe the Blarks have a lot more money than the Orps because of things that happened a long time ago, like maybe the Blarks won a war, or they found gold, or something else happened that made them get a lot of money.” Participants rated each statement separately on a 9-point scale ranging from 1=‘really not right’ to 9-‘really right’.

Political attitudes

After each planetary example, there was a measure of conservatism consisting of four

questions. Two related to participant’s tolerance of existing inequality, e.g. “How important do you think having a more equal distribution of wealth is for society on Planet Grag?”; and two related to attitudes about needing a societal change, e.g. “How much of priority should it be to change the way things are (e.g., laws, policies) on Planet Grag?”. (see Appendix C for a complete record of the content).

Appendix A: Need for Cognition Measure

<need for cognition measure, * are reverse scored>

1. I would prefer complex to simple problems.
- 2 I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.
- 3 Thinking is not my idea of fun.*
- 4 I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.*
- 5 I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.*
- 6 I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.
- 7 I only think as hard as I have to. *
- 8 I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.*
- 9 I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.*
- 10 The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.
- 11 I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.
- 12 Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.*
- 13 I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.
- 14 The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.
- 15 I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.
- 16 I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.*
- 17 It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.*
- 18 I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.

For each

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely uncharacteristic of me	somewhat uncharacteristic of me	uncertain	somewhat characteristic of me	extremely characteristic of me

Appendix B: Readings

Awareness of rips

Awareness of rips on Australian beaches is crucial due to their potentially life-threatening nature. Rips are powerful, narrow currents that flow from the shoreline back out to sea, posing a significant risk to swimmers. Australia's extensive coastline means that rips are common occurrences, making it essential for beachgoers to be educated about their dangers. If caught in a rip, it's essential to remain calm and avoid panicking. The natural instinct may be to swim against the current back to shore, but this can quickly lead to exhaustion. Instead, swimmers should conserve energy by floating or treading water and signaling for help. It's crucial not to fight the rip but to swim parallel to the shore to escape its pull. Once out of the rip, swimmers can then make their way back to shore at an angle.

Additionally, being aware of rip currents can help prevent accidents altogether. Swimmers should always swim between the red and yellow flags, which designate patrolled areas and indicate safer swimming conditions. If unsure about conditions or the presence of rips, it's best to ask lifeguards for advice or refrain from swimming altogether.

Raising awareness about rip currents through educational campaigns, signage, and public outreach is essential for promoting beach safety in Australia. By understanding the risks associated with rips and knowing how to respond if caught in one, beachgoers can enjoy the coastline safely while minimizing the potential for accidents and tragedies.

Fundamental attribution error

The fundamental attribution error (FAE) is a concept in social psychology that refers to the tendency of individuals to overemphasize personal characteristics or dispositions when explaining the behaviour of others, while underemphasizing the influence of situational factors. In other words, when we observe someone's actions, we often attribute their behaviour to their inherent traits or personality, rather than considering external circumstances that might have influenced their actions.

This bias in judgment occurs because humans naturally seek to make sense of the world around them and understand why people behave the way they do. In doing so, we often rely on mental shortcuts or heuristics, which can lead to errors in judgment. The FAE can have significant implications in various contexts, such as interpersonal relationships, organizational settings, and even in the criminal justice system.

For example, if someone cuts us off in traffic, we might immediately label them as a rude or inconsiderate person without considering that they might be rushing to an emergency or simply made a mistake. Similarly, in the workplace, we might attribute a colleague's success to their intelligence or hard work, while overlooking the advantages they may have had, such as access to resources or supportive mentors. Understanding the fundamental attribution error is crucial for improving our ability to accurately perceive and interpret others' behaviours. By being aware of this bias, we can become more empathetic and considerate in our judgments, taking into account both personal characteristics and situational factors that may influence behaviour. This can ultimately lead to better communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution in various social contexts.

Personal circumstances prompt

Alby's story serves as a poignant reminder of the critical importance of considering an individual's personal circumstances before passing judgment. Born into poverty and subjected to abuse from a young age, Alby's tumultuous upbringing laid the groundwork for his descent into heroin addiction. It's crucial to recognize that addiction often arises as a coping mechanism in response to trauma and adversity, rather than as a result of inherent moral failing.

As Alby grappled with the grip of addiction in his twenties, he resorted to non-violent crimes such as break-ins and car theft to sustain his habit. While these actions may be viewed as criminal and morally reprehensible on the surface, a deeper examination reveals the underlying desperation and vulnerability driving Alby's behavior. His actions were a manifestation of the stark choices presented by his circumstances—a stark choice between feeding his addiction and facing the agony of withdrawal.

By delving into Alby's backstory, we gain a fuller understanding of the complexities that shape an individual's actions. Rather than rushing to condemn him as a criminal, we are compelled to empathize with the adversity he has faced and acknowledge the systemic failures that have contributed to his predicament. Only by recognizing the interplay of personal circumstances and societal factors can we begin to address the root causes of issues such as addiction and crime.

In essence, Alby's story underscores the importance of compassion and empathy in our judgments of others. It prompts us to look beyond surface-level actions and consider the broader context in which they occur. By doing so, we can foster a more just and equitable society that seeks to uplift rather than condemn those who have been marginalized by circumstance.

Appendix C : Planetary text and questions

Now I want to tell you about a planet far far away called Teeku. There are two kinds of people that live on Planet Teeku, the Blarks and the Orps. And you know what? On planet Teeku, the Blarks have a lot more money than the Orps. The Blarks have a lot more money than the Orps.

Why do you think this is?

[Inherent question]

Maybe the Blarks have a lot more money because the Blarks are smarter, or are better workers than the Orps are, or there's something else about them that makes them get a lot of money.

<9-point scale (1 = 'really not right', 9 = 'really right').>

[Extrinsic question]

Maybe the Blarks have a lot more money than the Orps because of things that happened a long time ago, like maybe the Blarks won a war, or they found gold, or something else happened that made them get a lot of money.

<9-point scale (1 = 'really not right', 9 = 'really right').>

<page break>

[Political attitudes questions x4]

How negative is your impression of the current inequality between the Blarks and the Orps?

<9-point scale (1 = 'not at all negative', 9 = 'extremely negative').>

How important do you think having a more equal distribution of wealth is for society on Planet Teeku?

<9-point scale (1 = 'not at all important', 9 = 'extremely important').>

How much of priority should it be to change the way things are (e.g., laws, policies) on Planet Teeku?

<9-point scale (1 = 'lowest priority', 9 = 'highest priority').>

How in favour would you be of leaving things on Planet Teeku exactly as they've been?

<9-point scale (1 = 'strongly in favour', 9 = 'not at all in favour').>

<page break>

Now I want to tell you about a planet far far away called Grag. There are two kinds of people that live on Planet Grag, the Joops and the Frips. And you know what? On planet Grag, the Joops always get better grades in school than the Frips. The Joops always get better grades in school than the Frips.

Why do you think this is?

[Inherent question]

Maybe the Joops get better grades in school because the Joops work harder, or ask better questions than the Frips do, or there's something else about them that makes them get better grades.

<9-point scale (1 = 'really not right', 9 = 'really right').>

[Extrinsic question]

Maybe the Joops get better grades than the Frips because their families have more school supplies, like textbooks and computers and other things that help the Joops get better grades.

<9-point scale (1 = 'really not right', 9 = 'really right').>

<page break / new section>

[Political attitudes questions x4]

How negative is your impression of the current inequality between the Joops and the Frips?

<9-point scale (1 = 'not at all negative', 9 = 'extremely negative').>

How important do you think having a more equal distribution of wealth is for society on Planet Grag?

<9-point scale (1 = 'not at all important', 9 = 'extremely important').>

How much of priority should it be to change the way things are (e.g., laws, policies) on Planet Grag?

<9-point scale (1 = 'lowest priority', 9 = 'highest priority').>

How in favour would you be of leaving things on Planet Grag exactly as they've been?

<9-point scale (1 = 'strongly in favour', 9 = 'not at all in favour').>