Commentary on Towards a Balanced Social Psychology

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Building An Even Better Conceptual Foundation

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Abstract

Krueger and Funder spend too much time on their critique of some classic studies in Social Psychology.   They should have spent more time developing their constructive ideas about better methodologies and, especially, better conceptual foundations for the field. We endorse their exhortation to consider

social behavior in its ecologically adaptive context and we present a few ideas of our own about how to develop a more comprehensive conceptual framework.

Text

Krueger and Funder are unhappy with two traditions of research in Social Psychology. They provide a biting and occasionally witty critique of classic demonstrations of misbehavior (over-conformity, over-obedience, and failures to help) and the heuristics and biases approach to social cognition. Many of their insights into weaknesses of these approaches have merit, although their relentlessly negative perspective vastly undervalues the enormous positive contributions of research from these traditions. Any school of behavioral research can be subjected to scathing criticism; indeed the authors' own Realistic Accuracy Model is also limited in many ways.

Acknowledging that there is something to learn from a critical evaluation of these major pillars of the social psychological canon, we were more interested in Krueger and Funder's affirmative suggestions for improvements in methods and theory. Most of their suggestions are methodological and we have already expressed our enthusiasm for the correspondence framework for the analysis of degrees of accuracy (see Hastie & Rasinski, 1987, for an introduction to the correspondence-coherence distinction, a discussion of "methodological logics" for judgment research, and a comment on the manner in which the null hypothesis test has obstructed the study of social judgment).   And, like Krueger and Funder, we find the Bayesian framework to be conceptually superior to the Neumann-Pearson null hypothesis testing approach.   But, their essay does not help us understand the persistent popularity of the traditional approach. Perhaps there is an important lesson to be learned from the failure of the Bayesian approach to catch on in any major scientific field.

Since we are in essential agreement with Krueger and Funder's methodological imperatives, we would like to focus our attention on their suggestions for a stronger conceptual foundation for the field of Social Psychology.   Krueger and Funder view social behavior as central to human adaptation. They argue that it is essential to place social cognition in an

interpersonal context and to evaluate its overall adaptive success by a cost-benefit analysis. For example, referring to Funder's (1995) Kenny's (1994) frameworks for social judgment and personality perception, Krueger and Funder emphasize that social interactions are an ecologically indispensable ingredient of social cognition.   Social interactions determine what types of information are available and relevant to a perceiver, and prescribe the appropriate standards of accuracy by which to evaluate social judgment. Krueger and Funder also note that in the two traditions they criticize, "The paradigmatic study presents social stimuli directly to participants, thus bypassing relevance and availability completely, and bypassing the task of cue detection.   Traditional studies of social cognition concern the utilization stage exclusively" (p.39).

   We agree that considering interpersonal processes is essential to a more ecologically balanced picture of social behavior and cognition.   But, we believe that Krueger and Funder's recommendation about how to salvage social psychology still does not effectively banish the ubiquitous bias toward the study of "individual minds operating in a social vacuum," which has haunted cognitive social psychology. For example, Funder's Realistic Accuracy Model does not consider the rich context of multiple, partially redundant, substitutable social cues (Why else would they say that, "Accuracy is a difficult and remarkable achievement" [p. 39] and indicate the level of accuracy can be predicted by a simple multiplicative calculation?), nor is it clear where the promised cost-benefit analysis fits into the framework (Figure 2).   General criticisms of such individual-focused frameworks have been raised elsewhere (e.g., Nye & Brower, 1996) and we will not repeat them. Instead let us sketch our conception of a more comprehensive framework for social interdependence that extends Krueger and Funder's suggestions for a more balanced Social Psychology.

   Everyone agrees that the ultimate goal of Social Psychology is to provide insights and causal theories of everyday social behavior.   No social psychologists question this truism. But "social" seems to mean different things to different social psychologists.   For some, "social" means being motivated by the immediate <u>social policy</u> implications of the research findings.   Krueger and Funder suggest that this motivation is one reason for the emphasis on biases and social mis-behavior in some textbooks (e.g., Katzko, 2002).   For others, like

Krueger and Funder, "social" means that the stimulus that is being perceived and judged is another human being; the most social aspect of the framework is an analysis of agreement-disagreement between two perceivers of a target person. And for still others (including us), "social" means adaptive, strategic interaction in a matrix of enduring and shifting social relationships.

The perceiver-target framework is too limited and it excludes important factors of social motivation and strategic interaction. Without a broader theory of motivation and social interdependence we fear research will simply continue to produce lists of "effects" and "biases," that under some conditions <u>may</u> materialize in interpersonal perception (cf., Table 1). Although Krueger and Funder do not acknowledge it, the heuristics and biases approach to social cognition did more than simply catalogue biases and errors. The underlying conception of the mind, implicit in this approach, included a "cognitive toolbox" architecture with optional reliance on alternative heuristic judgment strategies. The strategies were associated with fundamental cognitive capacities (memory retrieval, similarity evaluation, causal simulation) that were responsible for the distinctive signature biases that were byproducts of reliance on each strategy (cf., Kahneman & Frederick, 2003). Even some of the harshest critics of the heuristics and biases approach, have adopted this basic conceptual framework (e.g., Gigerenzer, et al., 1999). But, a cognitive architecture is only part of a comprehensive conceptual framework (cf., J.R. Anderson, 1990; N.H. Anderson, 1996).

We think that Krueger and Funder's recommendation to consider the <u>ecological context</u> of social behavior should be taken more seriously. Only a few social psychologists have grappled with the adaptive character of social interactions. Indeed, we see little evidence that Krueger and Funder have seriously addressed these issues. However, this challenge has been accepted by behavioral ecologists studying animal behavior (e.g., Dawkins & Krebs, 1978; Hauser, 1996). Interaction and communication among animals are often deceptive and manipulative, as well as cooperative. And, even some of the most mysterious animal social behaviors can be understood as solutions to the adaptive problems of securing essential resources such as food, mating opportunities, social power, et cetera (Byrne, 1995). This is no different for humans! Game theory and Evolutionary Game Theory provide truly comprehensive frameworks to understand the adaptive essence of social

interaction (e.g., Gintis, 2000; Maynard-Smith, 1982).   These approaches come with powerful analytic and simulation tactics for theory building as well as original observational and experimental methodologies. More than twenty-five years ago Kelley and Thibaut (1978) attempted to introduce social psychologists to Game Theory, but their effort was unsuccessful. We think Social Psychology has made a major error by myopically ignoring these important and productive approaches. Without more comprehensive foundations, frameworks like the Realistic Accuracy Model will continue to generate superficial lists of "descriptive patterns," but miss deeper insights into the causes of social behavior.

We can point to a few illustrations of the kind of research we advocate. Camerer (2003) provides an accessible and profound introduction to the aspects of Game Theory most relevant to Social Psychology (and reading Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, is still instructive). Kameda, Takezawa & Hastie (2003) report an exemple study of the development of adaptive social norms; Kameda & Nakanishi (2002, in press) report cost-benefit analyses of social conformity. We applaud Krueger and Funder's goal of promoting the development of a balanced social psychology. But, we want to exhort social psychologists to take their adaptive theme further.   Even limited target-perceiver theories like the Realistic Accuracy Model need a more comprehensive foundation that deals with interdependencies among social agents.

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