Overcorrection for Social Categorization Information Drives Impact Bias in Affective Forecasting

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Affective forecasts guide consequential and quotidian medical, political, and legal decisions made on behalf of others.[1,2,3]

Typically, more information engenders more accurate forecasts.[4]

When forecasting for others, however, people overcorrect for social category information, leading them to make less accurate forecasts.

General Prompt: How happy or unhappy do you think a [target] will be right after his/her team [event]?
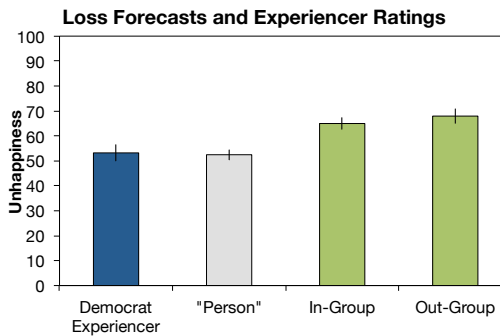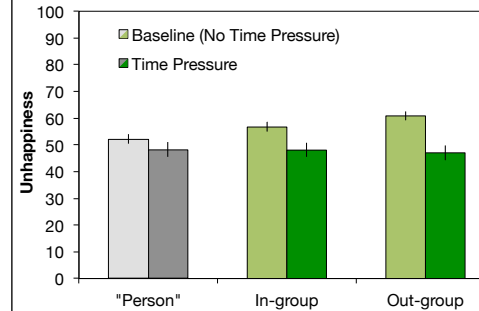
Experiment 1a:
2014 Midterm Elections

1042 Democrats and Republicans
Event: Winning and losing the race for the Senate majority
Results: Across both win and loss conditions, forecasts for group-labeled targets are significantly greater than experiencer ratings, whereas forecasts for a "person" are not.

Loss Forecasts and Experiencer Ratings (y-axis: Unhappiness; categories: Democrat Experiencer, "Person", In-Group, Out-Group)

Experiment 1b:
Harvard-Yale Football Game

309 Harvard and Yale Fans
Event: Losing the game
Results: Replicates Experiment 1a.

Loss Forecasts and Experiencer Ratings (y-axis: Unhappiness; categories: Yale Experiencer, "Fan", In-Group, Out-Group)

Experiment 2:
Word Search Tournament

512 Democrats and Republicans
Event: Losing a tournament, awarding a $200 donation to the other party
Results: Replicates Experiments 1a & 1b. Additionally, forecasts for the self resemble forecasts for a "person."

Loss Forecasts and Experiencer Ratings (y-axis: Unhappiness; categories: Experiencer, "Person", Self, In-Group, Out-Group)

Loss Forecasts (y-axis: Unhappiness; legend: Baseline (No Time Pressure), Time Pressure; categories: "Person", In-group, Out-group)

Experiment 3:
Differential Correction

1445 Democrats and Republicans
Event: Losing a tournament, awarding a $200 donation to the other party
Results: While baseline conditions replicate previous experiments, time pressure elicits improved, more accurate forecasts.
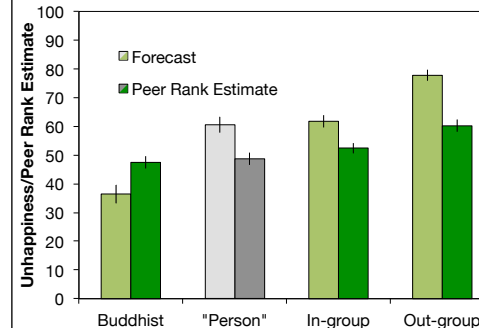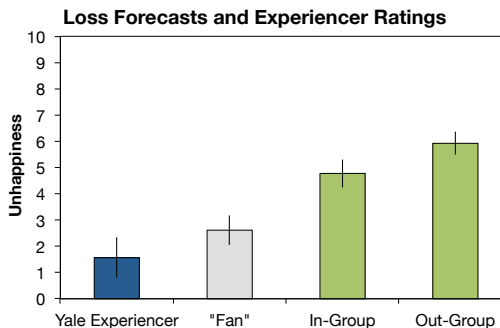

(y-axis: Unhappiness/Peer Rank Estimate; legend: Forecast, Peer Rank Estimate; categories: Buddhist, "Person", In-group, Out-group)

Experiment 4:
Stereotypes and Exemplars

545 Democrats and Republicans
Event: Losing a tournament, awarding a $200 donation to the other party
Results: Subjects rank their targets as average in extremity compared to 100 of the target's peers, indicating a reliance on stereotypes, not extreme exemplars.
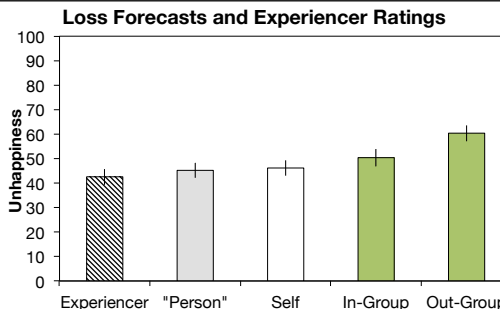
Conclusion

Social category information increases impact bias, leading people to *incorrectly* adjust their forecasts of how others—including in-group targets—will feel given a specific outcome.

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