

Deception

How We Fool Ourselves

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“I choose to believe there is good in everyone because of the unintended consequences to my life if I do not. I feel an openness to others that wouldn’t be there if I didn’t believe that there’s good in everybody.”

“I have a guardian angel that looks after me.”

“Everything happens for a reason.”

“Things turn out for the best.”

Positive Illusions

Matlin & Stang

The Pollyanna Principle

1978

Summarized over 1000 studies

- 1. When exposed to pleasant and unpleasant experiences for equal periods of time, people report the pleasant were more frequent.**
- 2. People remember pleasant information better and more accurately than unpleasant.**

(Matlin and Stang, 1978)

3. Pleasant information is easier to learn than unpleasant.

4. People recognize pleasant words quicker than unpleasant.

(Matlin and Stang, 1978)

5. People exaggerate the likelihood of pleasant events.

6. The pleasant member of antonym pairs is said before the unpleasant, for instance, good-bad, sweet-sour, right-wrong.

7. Pleasant words tended to enter the English language first and have higher frequencies than do unpleasant.

8. People use positive terms far more often than negative whether in writing or speaking.

9. People slant their memories in a positive direction over time.

10. People think the present is better for them personally than the past and the future will be better still regardless of the actual probabilities.

**Rated Selves More Positively
than Peer of Same Sex and Age**

87%

(Taylor, Lerner et al., Submitted for Publication)

One's Strengths **Important
Rare**

One's Failings **Unimportant
Common**

(Campbell, 1986; Marks, 1984)

Time is on Our Side

Poor Performance

Remember as Better

20 Minutes Later

(Greenwald, 1980)

Feedback

Positive **Recalled Easily
Process Quickly**

Negative **Hard to Recall
Processed Slowly**

(Kuiper and Derry 1982; Kuiper and MacDonald 1982; Kuiper, Olinger et al. 1985)

Not Recent Phenomena

One month

Rated mood each day compared to Own typical mood

Almost everybody

Typically happier than they typically are

(Johnson, 1938)

How does this apply to deception?

20 Years of Research on Lying

People rarely get above 60% accuracy

Some groups worse than chance

(Ekman, 1992)

Who Can't Tell?

Customs inspectors vs. college students

(Kraut & Poe, 1980)

Federal law enforcement officers vs students

(DePaulo & Pfeifer, 1986)

Police officers no better than chance

(Kohnken, 1987)

Who Can't Tell

Secret Service

Federal Polygraphers

Judges

Police

Psychiatrists

Students

(Ekman, 1991)

Who Can't Tell

Group	% Above Chance
Secret Service	29%
Psychiatrists	12%

(Ekman, 1991)

“A man's gotta know his limitations.”

But we don't

Federal law officers More confident than college students

No More Accurate

(DePaulo & Pfeifer, 1986)

Confidence and Accuracy

Unrelated

Exceptions: Federal law enforcement

Secret Service

(Ekman, 1991)

Confidence and Accuracy

Federal Officers

Confidence Before Related

Confidence After Unrelated

(Ekman, 1991)

Secret Service

Confidence Before Unrelated

Confidence After Wrong

Accuracy

What Didn't Make a Difference

Age

Sex

Years of Job Experience

(Ekman, 1991)

Accuracy

Polygraphers & Secret Service

Worse as Got Older

(Ekman, 1991)

Accuracy

Secret Service

More Years of Job Experience

Worse Accuracy

(Ekman, 1991)

Believing What We Hear

Repeating It

Increases Belief

(Arkes, Boehm et al.,1991; Arkes, Hacket et al., 1989; Begg, Armour et al., 1985; Hasher, Goldstein et al., 1977)

Believing What We Hear

Even believed statements labeled false

(Gerrig and Prentice,1991; Gilbert, Krull et al.,1990; Wegner, Lane et al., 1994)

Old Debate – New Life

Spinoza

Comprehending is Believing

Descartes

Comprehend then Believe or Not

Count numbers in statements

Some labeled true; some false

(Gilbert, Krull et al., 1990)

Results

Increased “False” labeled “True”

No Change in “True”

(Gilbert, Krull et al., 1990)

Stranger Approaches

Constant Talk

Too Many Details

Detraction

(De Becker, 1997)

Women Vs. Men

More capable of reading emotion

Until

Signals Discrepant

(Goldman, 1985)

“Women are just doing something that represents an intelligent social strategy. Smooth interaction requires that people not notice or comment on every little lapse in decorum, or every little bit of insincerity. Social life works by ignoring little social lies. Women seem wiser to this than men.”

(Judith Hall in Goleman 1985, p. 221)

Types of Positive Illusions

Control Over Random Events

World is Good and Meaningful

Control over Random Events

Prefer Lottery Card They Chose

Over

One with Better Odds

Control over Random Events

Athletes

Sports Fans

Gamblers

Personal Control & Aversiveness

Ability to Terminate Random Shocks

**Less Distress
Less Discomfort
Less Physiological Arousal**

Blaming Victims

“The Lord is faithful to those who are faithful to the Lord.”

(Miller and Tompkins, 1977, p. 86)

World is Good and Meaningful

Guardian Angels

Everything Happens for a Reason

Paying Karmic Debts

“There is a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem”

Wayne Dyer

“You have no problems, though you think you have.”

“Misery and suffering exist only in the mind”

“If God made everything, and God is good, then everything is good.”

(Dyer, 2001)

Worry, Stress and Anxiety

Vibrating at 10,000 cycles per second

Nirvana

Vibrating at 100,000 cycles per second

Just World

Blaming People for Outcome

Even if Randomly Assigned

(Lerner, 1978)

Impact on our views of Offenders

No victims and no offenders

Narrow motivations to our own

What is Mental Health?

Good Reality Testing?

“Here is the gist of the matter. Life in this world serves a higher purpose; . . . Over each one of us there watches a benevolent Providence which is only seemingly stern and which will not suffer us to become a plaything of the over-mighty and pitiless forces of nature. In the end all good is rewarded and all evil punished, if not actually in this form of life then in the later existences that begin after death. . . . Life after death. . . brings us all the perfection that we may perhaps have missed here.”

(Freud, 1927, p. 23-24)

“The masses are lazy and unintelligent.”

(Freud, 1927, p. 49)

Definition of Mental Health

“Mentally healthy perception means a process of viewing the world so that one is able to take in matters one wishes were different without distorting them to fit those wishes.”

(Jahoda 1958, p. 349)

Effect of Self-Enhancement

Correlated with

**Good Relations with Others
Personal Growth
Purpose in Life
Self-Esteem
Mastery
Self-Acceptance**

(Taylor, in press)

Effect of Self-Enhancement

Negatively Correlated with

State Anxiety

Depression

Self-Blame

Neuroticism

(Taylor, in press)

Impact of Trauma on World View

Non-Traumatized Beliefs

Above average

Things will work out

Underestimate chances of negative events

Overestimate chances of positive events

Overestimate personal efficacy

Lifetime Probabilities of Experiencing Trauma

Type	%
Fire	10
Car wreck w/ injury	23
Robbery	25
Loved one die from homicide, suicide or accident	30
Some sort	69

(Norris, 1992)

“A paralyzed accident victim told me that he was now aware of how wonderful it was to have a good mind; he had been so involved in sports and physical pursuits that he was unaware of how precious books and learning could be.”

(Janoff-Bulman 1992)

Trauma-Based World View

Shattered Assumptions

Belief in Personal Invulnerability

Belief the World is Meaningful

Belief in Personal Efficacy

(Janoff-Bulman, 1992)

Fall-Out from Chowchilla Kidnapping

“Massive interferences with Optimism & Trust”

(Terr, 1985)

Fall-Out from Chowchilla Kidnapping

Age 9 **Russians ruining ozone layer; everybody killed**

Age 10 **World end in 2000; Live in mountains: towns not safe**

Fall-Out from Chowchilla Kidnapping

23 of 25 Afraid of the Future

World View and Sexual Abuse

“When you get old, you die. I have grandparents who are sixty or sixty-nine and I don’t think they are ready to die. But I sometimes think I am going to die sooner than other people – I don’t know why I think this. I think bad people will hurt me. I may be killed instead of dying.”

(Terr, 1990 p. 31)

“A marginally bearable sense of helplessness, a realization that one’s own will and wishes become irrelevant to the course of events, leaving either a view of the self that is damaged, contaminated by the humiliation, pain, and fear that the event imposed; or a fragmented sense of self.”

(Spiegel, 1990, p. 251)

“The key to the good life might well be illusions at our deepest, most generalized level of assumptions and accuracy at the most specific, least abstract levels.”

(Janoff-Bulman 1992)

The Solution?

Awareness of illusions

Illusions at broadest levels

Multiple possibilities at more concrete

Consider best & worse possibilities

Hope for the best; consider the worse

Remember

“The mountains don’t care”

and

It’s dangerous to pretend they do