

contending theories are given the benefit of the doubt, (2) the decision and inference rules are independent of the researcher's vested interests, and (3) any undue influence brought about by the researcher's theoretical stance can be detected readily.

In sum, K&F could have made a stronger case for a balanced psychology had their advocacy stance been less zealous. It would also have helped had statistical issues been distinguished from methodological or conceptual issues.

## Psychologists seek the unexpected, not the negative, to provoke innovative theory construction

John Darley and Alexander Todorov

Department of Psychology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544-1010.  
jdarley@princeton.edu atodorov@princeton.edu

**Abstract:** Krueger & Funder (K&F) see social psychologists as driven to demonstrate that people's behavior falls below relevant moral and intellectual standards. We suggest that social psychologists search for demonstrations of when it is that people's actual behaviors and decisions deviate from expected or ideal behaviors and decisions, and what these "deviations" tell us about general decision processes, including those that do not produce unexpected actions. Often the discoveries are of positive rather than negative behaviors.

According to Krueger & Funder (K&F), social psychologists and judgment and decision-making researchers seek to demonstrate how people violate norms of decent human behavior and sensible human reasoning. K&F seem to suggest that this negative emphasis is rewarded, because these demonstrations of flawed behavior and reasoning are valorized by research peers and seized on by textbook authors. In any event, "a distorted view of human nature emerges" (target article, sect. 1, para. 3).

K&F point out that one of the sources of the negative picture of human behavior is the comparison of some behavior with some normative standard, revealing that the behavior, on moral or intellectual terms, falls below the standard. However, not all such comparisons result in negative views. According to the rational actor model in economics, people are solely motivated by self-interest. One of the contributions of social psychology has been to show that in situations of economic games, people act in ways that are more cooperative, and more considerate of the well-being of others, than is expected from the normative standard (Dawes et al. 1988). Here then is a demonstration of human strengths, one that K&F should be pleased about.

Social and judgment and decision-making researchers sought to produce results that challenged the prevailing model of human functioning at the time. In social psychology, the prevailing image was that of the individual functioning with some independence of the social context, and in decision-making, the image was of a fully rational, information-seeking individual. The social psychologists substituted the conventional image for the image of an actor integrating the information concerning "what is going on" to determine her interpretations of the situation, and therefore her reactions to it. The insight shared by these researchers was that the behavior of other actors who were facing the same "objective" situation gave a good deal of information about the essential nature of the situation and therefore how to react to it. By using experimental variations that should create different interpretations in the participants' minds, the researchers attempted to enter the minds of the participants, carrying out what we now call a phenomenological analysis; determining why they acted as they did.

K&F imply that it is the researchers who cast the behaviors of their participants as normative and ethical failures. The implication strikes us as untrue in regard to the conformity, obedience, and bystander research that is the centerpiece of their censure. To

demonstrate this in the bystander area, here are two quotes, drawn from the two studies that they cite.

In one study (Darley & Latané 1968), subjects knew that many other subjects also heard the cries of a person in distress. They failed to intervene because their own responsibility for doing so was diffused. The experimenters commented that

Subjects who failed to report the emergency showed few signs of the apathy and indifference thought to characterize "unresponsive bystanders." . . . Why then didn't they respond? It is our impression that non-intervening subjects had not decided *not* to respond. Rather they were still in a state of indecision and conflict concerning whether to respond or not. (Darley & Latané 1968, pp. 381-82)

In the Darley and Batson (1973) study, seminarians who were hurrying to another building to give a short sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan often passed by a person in distress on their way to give the sermon. Here is what the researchers reported about why seminarians did so:

According to the reflections of some of the subjects it would be inaccurate to say that they realized the victim's possible distress, then chose to ignore it; instead, because of the time pressures, they did not perceive the scene in the alley as an occasion for an ethical decision. . . . For other subjects it seems more accurate to say that they decided not to stop. Why? . . . Because the experimenter, *whom the subject was helping*, was depending on him to get to a particular place quickly. In other words, he was in conflict between stopping to help the victim and continuing on his way to help the experimenter. . . . Conflict rather than callousness can explain their failure to stop." (Darley & Batson 1973, p. 108)

The participants are characterized as good people, who, caught up in complex situations, act in ways that they themselves would not wish. The ameliorative point of the bystander literature is that these actions are the products of situational forces, and people can train themselves to resist these forces. Although we do not have space to demonstrate it, we think that the conformity and obedience researchers also characterized the thought processes of their subjects in similar and similarly sympathetic ways. Milgram's (1974) chapter on "binding forces" is an example of this (Ch. 12). In the decision-making research tradition, as Tversky and Kahneman (1983) comment,

Our studies of inductive reasoning have focused on systematic errors because they are diagnostic of the heuristics that generally govern judgment and inference. In the words of Helmholtz, "It is just those cases that are not in accordance with reality which are particularly instructive for discovering the laws of the processes by which normal perception originates." The focus on bias and illusion is a research strategy that exploits human error, although it neither assumes nor entails that people are perceptually or cognitively inept.

K&F similarly mischaracterize social cognition research by suggesting that the metaphors underlying social cognition research have been predominantly negative. However, they fail to point out that the metaphors of the 1970s and 1980s (the "naïve scientist" and the "cognitive miser") have been replaced by the metaphor of "motivated tactician" (Fiske & Taylor 1991, Ch. 1). This metaphor emphasizes the pragmatic and functional aspects of social cognition, that is, that "thinking is for doing" (Fiske 1992; 1993).

Given the purpose of K&F's article, it is certainly justified to selectively review the literature. But writing about the status of contemporary social cognition without mentioning a single work on dual-process models (e.g., Chaiken & Trope 1999) is puzzling. The rise of the dual-process framework is a major recent development in the field of social cognition. Dual-process models attempt to integrate forms of heuristic reasoning with presumably more rational forms of reasoning into a single framework, without assigning evaluative labels to any of these forms of reasoning. This integration encompasses both social cognition and judgment and decision-making (e.g., Chaiken & Trope 1999; Kahneman & Frederick 2002; Sloman 1996). Again, the thrust of this work is inconsistent with the picture of social cognition depicted by K&F.

Take their discussion of research on dispositional inferences. One of the most influential social cognition models of such inferences starts from and documents the assumption that people correct for situational influences (Trope 1986; Trope & Liberman 1997; Trope & Liberman 1999). However, the correction may not be easily detectable because of the nature of the processes involved. This model does not blame people for falling prey to cognitive errors. Instead, it specifies the exact conditions under which insufficient discounting could arise. But again, this work is not mentioned.

Toward the end of their article, K&F cite a report by one of us (Carlsmith et al. 2002) that they seem to feel demonstrates that "ordinary people's moral judgments are . . . irrational." In fact, the research demonstrates that people who are assigning punishments to wrong-doers generally do so from a just deserts perspective, rather than a deterrence perspective. Why this demonstration that people reason in ways advocated by Emmanuel Kant is a demonstration of irrationality escapes us. That study is encased within a project attempting to demonstrate that the citizens' sense of justice is generally sensible and coherent, and legal code drafters would be wise to pay more attention to it than they do – hardly a message that expresses negativity for the moral reasoning of ordinary people.

In sum, social psychologists seek to find instances in which ordinary behavior deviates from conventional expectations for it, and to explore the reasons for these deviations. It is sometimes the case that these deviations could be labeled as "negative" ones, but in many cases the deviations from expected conduct are positive ones. Although we cannot say that no investigator has ever slipped and characterized participants' behavior as negative, we can say that the tradition of phenomenological analysis has led the researchers to sympathetically understand the participants' reasoning, and to describe it on those terms. By presenting a very narrow view of social psychology, K&F risk reifying the type of research that they are trying to abolish.

### But what would a balanced approach look like?

David Dunning

Department of Psychology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-7601.  
dad6@cornell.edu <http://people.psych.cornell.edu/~dunning/>

**Abstract:** Krueger & Funder (K&F) could have gone further to sketch out a more comprehensive vision of "balanced" psychology. The triumphs and travails of other sciences (e.g., economics) provide clues about the advantages and pitfalls of pursuing such an approach. Perhaps introducing more positivity into psychology may involve asking how people can do better, not how well they do already.

Krueger & Funder (K&F) are to be commended for their call for "balance" in social psychology. I just wish they had gone further. In complaining that social psychologists dwell unfairly on the negative, the authors provide what I assume some will describe as an unbalanced (and notably negative) discussion of the issues – selectively emphasizing some data while ignoring other data that contradict their assertions. Here is one example I know about: In Kruger and Dunning (1999), we asserted that incompetent people overestimate themselves because they cannot spot their own incompetence. K&F dismiss our analysis as a statistical artifact, yet fail to cite crucial data that directly rule this artifact out (Kruger & Dunning 1999, Studies 3 and 4; Kruger & Dunning 2002). I agree with the authors that researchers should strive for balance, but balance requires considering all the data that speak to an issue, not just a selective sampling that favors one broad argument over another.

But there is a more compelling way the authors could have gone further. The point that social psychology is (too) negative has been made in many guises before. Instead, the authors could have made

a "constructive" case and brought a more comprehensive vision of a balanced approach into sharper focus by describing in more detail and precision what such a psychology would look like, even if by example. How does one more specifically weave human strengths into psychological theorizing in a broad and integrated way, without simply creating an ad hoc laundry list of competencies to lean up against the miscellaneous list of errors that the authors claim the field obsesses about?

Examples of incorporating human strengths into theorizing about the human animal are out there, and I am surprised that the authors did not consider their potential relevance for social psychology. Many social, behavioral, informational, and biological sciences adjacent to psychology start from the positive premise that people act in adaptive, indeed optimal, ways. Economics has made a good deal of intellectual hay over the last century assuming that people act in their rational self-interest. Animal behaviorists have assumed that animals act to maximize rewards and minimize punishments. Rational choice theorists in sociology assume that people enforce norms and bargain with others to optimize their social fortune. Computer scientists study how computer networks evolve to achieve maximum efficiency. One can assume, given the success of these fields, that one could import the idea of a rational, optimal, positive creature into social psychology.

But these fields also show that thinking about humans in positive ways requires a lot of hard theoretical work to get it right. Economics, in one telling example, has much trouble with the core issue of what exactly people are pursuing when they are rational. It became clear early on that people did not seek to maximize objective outcomes, and so the field created the concept of *utility*. But this concept is a slippery one to grasp. Utility does not necessarily mean hedonic pleasure, for people at times make choices that cause them pain and discomfort. Perhaps utility is synonymous with choice, but if it is tantamount to choice, how can it explain choice without being a mere tautology? And good luck at coming up with an objective and quantifiable measure of utility that is suitable for interpersonal comparison (Homans 1958; Luce & Raiffa 1957). But beyond that, economics is coming to grips with the idea that people are not necessarily rational in fundamental ways, as Danny Kahneman's recent Nobel Prize attests, and is beginning to work to incorporate error into its longstanding models.

I bring up this example not to disparage a psychology based on human strengths, but to show that getting it right will require some hard thought that will run up against some vexing and sometimes impossible issues. What are people maximizing when they get it right? Are they actually maximizing the right thing? Must people maximize, or does it suffice to satisfy? Talking about human strengths without first addressing these basic questions may lead to research that presents warm bottom lines, but will miss an opportunity to create a overarching framework for talking about strength and weakness.

In the meantime, I do not share the authors' pessimism about the future worth of the "error" tradition. As Robert Heinlein once said, it is difficult to learn from anyone who agrees with you, and it would be likewise difficult for people to learn unless research at times contradicts the usual rosy view people hold of themselves. Indeed, if psychology is serious about contributing to human capital (i.e., the knowledge and skills a society possesses), it would do well to point out peoples' imperfections so that they can correct them. There is a reason why hospitals regularly hold mortality conferences to examine patient deaths, rather than discussions about patients who lived long enough to pay the bill. Doctors, in the main, do a terrific job, but they are ever mindful that they can do better.

How do we best incorporate positive messages into psychological research? Serious research aimed at increasing human capital does not stop at characterizing whether people are good or bad at what they do naturally. Instead, such research focuses on how the situation can be changed to make people do *better*. I think all researchers, whether they be more comfortable with error or accu-