

Complexes and Cognitive Biases

It is the archetypal nature of the unconscious to organize implicit symbols and archetypal functions into an internal narrative; a mental, emotional, and behavioral guidance system that, Bargh & Morsella (2008) theorize, primes the automaticity of daily decisions.

Complexes are archetypal functions that arise from emotionally charged symbols; exaggerated “memories, emotions, cognitions and bodily sensations that are reflexively triggered and steer the behavior” (Meier, 2013) in ways that are “not appropriate to the situation, but rather stereotyped” (Meier, 2013). They “function automatically and have a compulsive quality” (Meier, 2013). According to Meier (2013) There are four different attitudes towards complexes.

- Having no inkling of their existence (everything is unconscious),
- Identification with the complex
- The projection of the complex and
- Confronting the complex Once formed, complexes strongly influence cognitive biases and heuristic thinking patterns.

Once formed, complexes result in selective perception. Selective perception is a cognitive function that causes cognitive bias. “The ability of cognitive biases to deeply impact processing has been demonstrated numerous times. Such effects have multiple implications for personal experience and knowledge of self, including an inability (or unwillingness) to learn from past experiences, as well as positive illusions about the self and the world” (“Biases and Defense Mechanisms as Limits to Learning,” 2022). “Cognitive models of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) postulate that cognitive biases in attention, interpretation, and memory represent key factors involved in the onset and maintenance of PTSD” (Wouda, Verwoerd, & Krans, 2017).

According to Cherry (2019) there are **12 common types of cognitive biases**.

- Confirmation Bias: This is favoring information that conforms to your existing beliefs and discounting evidence that does not conform.
- Halo Effect: Your overall impression of a person influences how you feel and think about his or her character. This especially applies to physical attractiveness influencing how you rate their other qualities.
- Self-Serving Bias: This is the tendency to blame external forces when bad things happen and give yourself credit when good things happen. When you win a poker hand it is due to your skill at reading the other players and knowing the odds, while when you lose it is due to getting dealt a poor hand.
- Attentional Bias: This is the tendency to pay attention to some things while simultaneously ignoring others. When deciding on which car to buy, you may pay attention to the look and feel of the exterior and interior but ignore the safety record and gas mileage.
- Actor-Observer Bias: This is the tendency to attribute your own actions to external causes while attributing other people's behaviors to internal causes. You attribute

your high cholesterol level to genetics while you consider others to have a high level due to poor diet and lack of exercise.

- Functional Fixedness: This is the tendency to see objects as only working in a particular way. If you don't have a hammer, you never consider that a big wrench can also be used to drive a nail into the wall. You may think you don't need thumbtacks because you have no corkboard on which to tack things, but not consider their other uses. This could extend to people's functions, such as not realizing a personal assistant has skills to be in a leadership role.
- Anchoring Bias: This is the tendency to rely too heavily on the very first piece of information you learn. If you learn the average price for a car is a certain value, you will think any amount below that is a good deal, perhaps not searching for better deals. You can use this bias to set the expectations of others by putting the first information on the table for consideration.
- Misinformation Effect: This is the tendency for post-event information to interfere with the memory of the original event. It is easy to have your memory influenced by what you hear about the event from others. Knowledge of this effect has led to a mistrust of eyewitness information.
- False Consensus Effect: This is the tendency to overestimate how much other people agree with you.
- Optimism Bias: This bias leads you to believe that you are less likely to suffer from misfortune and more likely to attain success than your peers.

Cognitive biases are expressed through heuristic thinking patterns. "A heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows an individual to make a decision, pass judgment, or solve a problem quickly and with minimal mental effort.

Eric Rutberg, DHEd, LCPC
© December 26, 2021