

Ross' False Consensus Effect Experiments ^[1]

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Everyone's got their own biases in each and every occasion, even when estimating other people's behaviors and the respective causes. One of these is called the false consensus bias. Psychologist Professor Lee Ross conducted studies on setting out to show how false consensus effect operates.

The phenomenon of false consensus effect centralizes on people's tendency to project their way of thinking onto other people, thinking other people think the same way as they do. This logical fallacy may involve a group or just a sole individual that assumes their own set of opinions; beliefs and impressions are more prevalent amongst public than they actually are.

In the 1977, Stanford University social psychologist Professor Lee Ross conducted a research that focuses on "biases in human inference, judgment, and decision making, especially on the cognitive, perceptual and motivational biases that lead people to misinterpret each other's behavior and that create particular barriers to dispute resolution and the implementation of peace agreements." ([Lee Ross' Profile, Stanford](#) ^[3])

First Study: Methodology

Professor Ross conducted 2 studies meant to show how the false consensus effect works.

In the first study, participants were asked to read about situations in which a conflict occurred and then told two alternative ways of responding to the situation. They were asked to do three things:

1. Guess which option other people would choose
2. Say which option they themselves would choose
3. Describe the attributes of the person who would likely choose each of the two options.

Results

The results evidently showed that most of the subjects had thought that other people would do the same as them, regardless of which of the two responses they actually chose themselves. This validates the phenomenon of false consensus effect, where an individual thinks that other people think the same way they do when actually they often don't.

Another observation that emerged from the study is that when participants were asked to describe the attributes of the people who will likely make the choice opposite their own, subjects made extreme predictions about the personalities of those who didn't share their choice.

Second Study: Methodology

A new set of subjects were asked if they would be willing to take a 30-minute walk around the campus wearing a sandwich board that says "Eat at Joe's". To motivate the subjects, they were told they will learn something useful by the end of the study, and that they are at the same time free to refuse participating if they do not feel like it.

Results

The results of this study only reconfirmed what has already been found out in their previous study. Among all those who agreed to wear the sandwich board, 62% thought other would also agree like they did. Among those who refused, 33% thought others would agree to wear the sandwich board.

Just like in the first study, subjects in this study made extreme predictions about the type of person who will make a decision opposite to theirs.

Application

The phenomenon of false consensus effect validates the fact that people have the tendency to judge how people make decisions based on how they would make their own. And if other people do decide to do otherwise, they view them as someone defective or unacceptable.

Sources

[Why We All Stink as Intuitive Psychologists: The False Consensus Effect](https://staging.explorables.com/false-consensus-effect) [4]

[Wikipedia: False Consensus Effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_consensus_effect) [5]

[Lee D. Ross Professional Profile](http://lee.ross.socialpsychology.org/) [3]

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