8-23-2002

Trends. A Room With a Cue: Validating an Age-Old Intelligence Tool?

Editor

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Abstract: This article discusses the psychological implications of the choices regarding physical features of a given individual's environment (e.g., a person's office).

A recent study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology suggests that the choice of the physical features of one's office or bedroom may be validly suggestive of one's personality and social characteristics. Moreover, these characteristics may be inferred by others who only have access to the physical features of one's office and/or bedroom.

Gosling et al. (2002) compared observer ratings of individuals based purely on offices or bedrooms with self- and peer ratings of the same individuals. These researchers collected data that might support the hypotheses that-with slight variation across contexts and traits-(1) personal environments elicit similar inferences from observers; (2) observer inferences are at least somewhat accurate; (3) observers rely on valid physical cues to construct inferences of the individuals; and (4) sex and race stereotypes seem to affect both the consensus and accuracy of observers.

Certainly, the employment of self-chosen or self-tolerated physically environmental cues to construct inferences about an individual is a time-honored tradition. But what time has not yet honored is whether the consensus and putative accuracy related to the employment of any set of cues bears on some crucial psychological essence of an individual or instead bears only on shared language usage, shared social intrapsychic processing beyond language, or even some soul-fragmenting dynamic of alienation. In an era in which intelligence analysis is publicly declaimed as ever more crucial, we may still need to go outside a room of cues. (See Epley, N., Savitsky, K., & Gilovich, T. (2002). Empathy neglect: Reconciling the spotlight effect and the correspondence bias. Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 83, 300-312; Gosling, S. D., Ko, S. J., Mannarelli, T., & Morris, M. E. (2002). A room with a cue: Personality judgments based on offices and bedrooms. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82, 379-398; Johnson, K. K.P., Schofield, N. A., & Yurchisin, J. (2002). Appearance and dress as a source of information: A qualitative approach to data collection. Clothing & Textiles Research Journal, 20, 125-137; Werth, L., & Foerster, J. (2002). Implicit person theories influence memory judgments: The circumstances under which metacognitive knowledge is used. European Journal of Social Psychology, 32, 353-362.) (Keywords: Personality, Social Context, Social Psychology.)