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THE ROLE OF OMISSION IN SELF-DECEPTION

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INTRODUCTION

Kevin Lynch (2017) provides a non-intentionalist, revisionist account of self-deception which holds that self-deception is due to biased systematic processing. What this amounts to is that, according to Lynch, self-deception occurs because the self-deceiver intentionally seeks favorable evidence and critically scrutinizes unfavorable evidence while at the same time they unintentionally omit to scrutinize favorable evidence and seek unfavorable evidence, forming a bias that the self-deceiver is unaware of (biased systematic processing). While this depicts many cases of self-deception, there are also circumstances where the self-deceiver intentionally avoids opposing and unwelcome evidence, intentionally ignoring it. Lynch recognizes this, but doesn't include it within his model, vaguely stating that oftentimes people operate without such reflective awareness of their biases.

OBJECTIVE:

Uncover how intentional omissions fit within non-intentionalist, revisionist theories such as Lynch's.

Cognitive dissonance and the belief-disconfirmation paradigm suggest intentional omissions are motivated by the desire to maintain truth in one's pre-established and welcome belief (*that p*), as it relieves discomfort and dissonance.

INTENT & BIAS

A self-deceiver is mainly motivated by and has the intention of finding truth/falsity in their desired proposition, but this process is heavily biased.

This process is biased because the individual is a 'stakeholder' in their belief; Self-deceivers invest part of their identity in the validity of *p*.

Bias is formed by the combination of Actions & Omissions (see below).

Actions are inherently intentional; seeking implies intention.

ACTIONS

Search for evidence supporting welcome thought (<i>that p</i>)	Search for evidence against unwelcome thought (<i>not p</i>)
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OMISSIONS

Fail to critically scrutinize evidence <i>that p</i>	Fail to search for evidence of <i>not p</i>
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UNINTENTIONAL OMISSIONS

BIASED SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING

For a self-deceiver to be unaware of bias, the omissions must be unintentional and representative of a neglect to seek out opposing information.

Anxious desire motivates the self-deceiver to act with the intention of finding weaknesses in the threatening evidence, or with the intention of finding supporting evidence for the welcome claim.

Because they are so driven to find certain information, they neglect to think judicially like a non-stakeholder: They neglect to critically assess that-*p*, and neglect to seek considerations supporting not-*p* (opposing cognition).

INTENTIONAL OMISSIONS

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE & THE BELIEF-DISCONFIRMATION PARADIGM (BDP)

Intentional omissions (avoiding unwelcome information) can be motivated by a desire to reduce cognitive dissonance.

When someone is confronted with unwelcome evidence, discomfort arises due to the inconsistency it creates, called dissonance.

As a stakeholder in their belief, there's pressure to defend this aspect of their identity that they've committed to and have acted on.

BDP: Someone could reject, refuse, or avoid contradictory beliefs due to dissonance created by inconsistent cognitions.

They may intentionally omit to scrutinize evidence of their belief, or intentionally omit to seek out evidence of the contradictory belief due to this discomfort.

There is potential that the self-deceiver becomes aware of their bias by intentional omissions, but this doesn't have to undermine self-deception.

WAYS TO REDUCE DISSONANCE WITHOUT CHANGING PRIOR BELIEF:

- Eliminate dissonant cognitions
- Add new consonant cognitions
- Reduce importance of dissonant cognitions
- Increase importance of consonant cognitions

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE DEPENDS ON:

- Relation between *not p* and conception of reality
- Consonance of *not p* with other cognitions
- Extent of pain/loss endured
- Satisfaction obtained from behavior

CONCLUSION

Self-deception involves continuous validation and re-establishment of the belief when confronted with opposing evidence, and intentional omissions as instances of avoidance are included within this process. Intentional omissions are motivated by the desire to maintain truth in one's pre-established and welcome belief (*that p*); perceived threat creates discomfort known as dissonance due to inconsistent thoughts. To reduce dissonance, the self-deceiver avoids critically scrutinizing evidence that-*p*, and avoids seeking out evidence that *not p*.

The belief-disconfirmation paradigm and cognitive dissonance theory create a framework for intentional omissions to fit within non-intentionalist, revisionist approaches.

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