Week 1 - Social cognition and social influence

- **Social psychology:** how people's thoughts, feelings & behavioural are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of behaviour

Methods used in social psychology

Experiments

- Causal conclusions – A causes B
- Laboratory experiment
  - Allows us to establish cause-effect relationships between variables
  - Highly artificial and highly controlled – cannot be generalised directly to less 'pure' conditions in the 'real' world
  - Low on *external validity* but high on *internal validity*
  - Prone to a range of biases: subject effects (wishing to please the experimenter); demand characteristics; experimenter effects (clues from experimenter) → can be prevented with a double-blind procedure
- Field experiment
  - Experiments conducted in naturalistic settings outside the lab
  - Have high external validity
  - Not reactive to demand characteristics – usually completely unaware of the experiment
  - Less control over extraneous variables
  - Random assignment is sometimes difficult
  - Can be difficult to obtain accurate measurements of subjective feelings

Non-experimental methods

- Correlational conclusions – A correlates (not causes) B
- Archival research - Involves the assembly or data or reports of data collected by others
- Case studies - In depth analysis of a single case or individual (i.e. Phineas Gage)
- Discourse analysis - A set of methods used to analyse text in order to understand its meaning and significance
- Survey research
  - Can involve structured interviews or questionnaires (open- or closed-ended)
  - Can obtain large amounts of data from large samples – generalisation not a problem
  - Subject to experimenter bias, subject bias and evaluation apprehension
- Field studies
  - Same as experimental method but without any interventions or manipulations; involves observation/recording/ coding of behaviour as it occurs
  - Excellent for investigating spontaneously occurring behaviour in its natural context
  - Prone to experimenter bias, lack of objectivity, poor generalisability & distortions dur to the impact of the researcher on the behaviour under investigation

Social cognition

- Focuses on how cognition is affected by wider and more immediate social contexts & how cognition affects our social behaviour

Forming impressions of other people

- What surrounds them
  - Central traits influence the words around them; peripheral traits don't have that much of an impact; change the meaning of the words around them
- How things are presented
  - Order of words → positive worst first = positive view; negative words first = negative view
  - Primacy effect → first impressions matter
- We are biased towards negative information
  - In the absence of info, people assume the best and form positive impressions; but any negative info attracts our attention – negative impressions are more difficult to change
- Physical appearance matters – attractive people are 'good'; height, weight, physical appearance earn more
- Stereotypes – types of clothes (suit vs. dirty t-shirt)

Cognitive algebra

- Summation: person is intelligent (+2), sincere (+3) and boring (-1) = 4
- Averaging (+2 +3 – 1)/3 = 1.33
- Weighted averaging: person is a politician, intelligence is important (+#) but if they are being assessed as a friend, humour is more important (+3) than intelligence (+1)

Social schemas

- A schema is a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, which allows us to quickly make sense of a person or situation
- Person schema: e.g. your best friend is intelligent and kind but silent in company
- Role schema: e.g. pilots fly planes and should not be seen drinking whiskey in the cabin
- Content-free schema: If I like John and John likes Tom, you will like Tom
- Script: in a lecture, you know that you will be sitting there listening, not singing and dancing or lying on the floor
- Self-schemas: form people's concept of who they are; may view yourself in a positive or negative way

Categories

- Prototype: the typical/ideal defining features of a category; e.g. lecturers are old men with big glasses and white lab coat
- Exemplar: specific instances of a member of a category – e.g. American viewed as Barak Obama
- Associative networks: model of memory in which nodes or ideas are connected by associative links along which cognitive activation can spread

Stereotypes

- Widely shared and simplified evaluative image of a social group and its members; e.g. Italians are emotional; slow to change
- Stereotypes become more pronounced and hostile when social tensions/conflict exist between groups, and then they are extremely difficult to modify

- Stereotypes stay stable if they (1) fit reality and (2) people are motivated to keep them
- Stereotype content model

		Competence	
		Low	High
Warmth	High	**Paternalistic stereotype** Low status, not competitive (e.g. housewives, elderly people, disabled people)	**Admiration** High status, not competitive (e.g. ingroup, close allies)
	Low	**Contemptuous stereotype** Low status, competitive (e.g. welfare recipients, poor people)	**Envious stereotype** High status, competitive (e.g. Asians, Jews, rich people, feminists)

How we use, acquire and change schemas

Which schemas do we use?

- Basic level categories that are neither too inclusive (e.g. women) nor too exclusive (e.g. female lawyers)
- Social stereotypes (e.g. politician) rather than trait schemas (e.g. intelligent)
- Schemas that are readily detectable (e.g. skin colour) or contextually distinctive
- Schemas that are accessible and important for us (e.g. racist)
- Schemas that are mood-congruent (e.g. happy) and based on earlier info (i.e. primacy effect)
- Individual differences
    - *Attributional complexity:* people vary in the complexity and number of their explanations of other people
    - *Uncertainty orientation:* people vary in their interest in gaining information versus remaining uninformed but certain
    - *Need for cognition:* people differ in how much they like to think deeply about things
    - *Need for cognitive close:* people differ in how quickly they need to tidy up cognitive loose ends and move to a decision or make a judgement
    - *Cognitive complexity:* people differ in the complexity of their cognitive processes and representation