

Social cognition: study of how people perceive, interpret and make sense of the world and their place within it.

Mind-machine/computer metaphor

Core principles of social cognition:

- **Experimentation:** controlled experiments in labs...
- Information processing metaphor of the person: person as naive scientist
- **Perceptual cognitive metatheory:** 'reality' is directly perceived through our senses and these inputs are then worked upon by internal cognitive computational processes
- **Mental representations:** mental structures such as schemas, attitudes and attributions organise knowledge, evaluations and expectations about objects in the world.

3 theoretical traditions:

Contrast to social cognition models: intra and inter-individual

1. **Social identity theory (SIT) & self-categorisation theory (SCT):** people are viewed first and foremost as social beings, deriving a sense of who they are and how they see the world from their social group memberships. Society is a complex web of intergroup relations. SIT reinstates the social (or group) within the individual. Originating in EU then North America and then AU. [intergroup level]
2. **Social representations theory (SRT):** how the stock of common sense theories and shared knowledge which derive from social interaction and communication shape both individual and collective perception – distinctly EU perspective. E.g. in Western cultures, you're sick, you see a doctor, medical views, other cultures may seek shaman, witch doctors etc. [collective and cultural level]
3. **Discursive psychology:** emphasize the centrality of discourse and rhetoric in everyday social life and interaction. Talk and conversation are basic and fundamental to social life. Traditionally this most primary of human activities has been largely ignored. [dialogic and rhetorical level].

Social identity theory (SIT)

Last year, we learned that we need to simplify info/categorise because we are overwhelmed with info. These categories help us make judgements. But looking within the individual (cognition) to explain for categorisation, stereotyping etc. neglected social contexts.

In contrast, **SIT analyse group membership and social conditions that frame intergroup relations at any given time to understand the social perception of the self and others.**

Minimal Group Studies (Tajfel et al 1971): designed to identify minimal conditions under which intergroup discrimination would occur – attempted to establish a no discrimination baseline, then add in variables.

- Minimal groups: meaningless group, no contact, no knowledge of other group members, no history of conflict or hostility, all they knew was which group they belonged to.

- Divided schoolboys into 2 groups based on preference for 2 artists Klee and Kandinsky. At this time 14-year-old boys wouldn't care about modern abstract art. They were told which group they belonged to, then were given a series of decision making to do, a payoff matrix.
- They expected to establish baseline of no competition/discrimination because it was meaningless grouping.
- It was found that mere awareness of belonging to one group as opposed to another (i.e. social categorisation into 2 groups) is sufficient to produce intergroup differentiation.
- On average, people chose around the *middle point (maximise in-group profit in background context of fairness)*, always made sure that they got just a little bit more (beating outgroup is more important than sheer profit).
- In such minimal condition, there's something driving people to differentiate their group positively from the other group & to compete in favour of their group.
- Found in many different countries, men are slightly more competitive than women.

Explanation for this effect: Tajfel and Turner introduced the concept of social identity to account for this effect. In such exp, subjects infuse meaningless categories with meaning and social significance, they identify with these assigned categories which become significant for self-definition and self-categorisation as a group member.

Festinger's social comparison theory:

- People seek a positive identity and positive self-esteem. We do the same for groups to which we belong – we strive towards differentiating our groups positively from others.
- The need to establish positive distinctiveness along valued dimensions. (Tajfel – give ourselves slightly more points and the other slightly less points).

2 central processes implicated in minimal group exp:

- Social categorisation – accentuate (make noticeable) the similarities between self and other ingroup members and exaggerates differences between self and outgroup. This produces distinct groups.
- Social comparison – by favouring own group on dimensions of comparison (allocating points), subjects differentiate own group positively from other group. Enhance self-esteem of in-group members. Strong motivation to evaluate membership positively so as enhance social identity.

Accentuation effect: when objects are categorised, similarities among members of one category are perceived as greater than they actually are, and differences between members of different categories are perceived to be greater than they actually are.

- Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) found this effect in the judgement of line lengths (even for physical stimuli/categories).
- Even when the differences were very small, once the lines were grouped, differences are exaggerated.
- Effect also found in social stimuli: white and black racial criteria.

