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Chapter 1 – Introducing Social Psychology

Social Psychology

- Scientific investigation of how people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others.
- Uses scientific methods to construct and test theories

Scientific Methods

Hypotheses-

- Involves the formulation of predictions on the basis of prior knowledge, speculation and causal or systematic observation.
- States what factors may cause something to occur
- Stated in a way that they can be tested empirically to see if they are true

Experimental Methods-

- An experiment is a hypothesis in which something is done to see its effects on something else
- Independent Variables
 - Features of a situation that change of their own accord, or can be manipulated by an experimenter to have effects on a dependent variables
 - Involves intervention in the form of manipulation of one or more independent variables
- Dependent Variables
 - Variables that change as a consequence of changes in the independent variable
 - Involves measurement of the effects of the treatment (manipulation) on one or more focal dependent variables
- Confounding Variables
 - Where two or more independent variables covary in such a way that it is impossible to know which has caused it
 - It is important to take all measures in order to avoid confounding variables
- Laboratory Experiment
 - Aim is to isolate and manipulate a single aspect of a variable, an aspect that may not normally occur in isolation outside the laboratory.
 - Aim to control as many potentially confounding variables as possible.
 - Intended to create artificial conditions
 - Allow us to establish cause and effect relationships between variables
 - *Low on external validity* (how similar conditions are to those usually encountered in the real world)
 - *High on internal validity* (the manipulation must be full of psychological impact and meaning for the participants)

- Prone to *subject effects* (effects that are not spontaneous, due to demand characteristics or participants wishing to please the experimenter)
- Should avoid *demand characteristics* (features of an experiment that demand a certain response) – by using *blind procedure* (unaware of the hypothesis of the experiment)
- Also prone to *experimenter effects* (influenced by clues to the hypothesis under examination, inadvertently communicated by the experimenter) – minimized by using *double blind procedure* (both experimenter and participant are unaware of the experimental conditions)
- Field Experiment
 - Experiments conducted in naturalistic settings outside the laboratory
 - *High external validity*- as participants aren't aware that an experiment is taking place
 - *No demand characteristics present*
 - Less control over extraneous variables

Non-experimental Methods-

- Involve the examination of correlation between naturally occurring variables
- Cannot draw causal conclusions
- Archival Research
 - Involves the assembly of data, or reports of data collected by others
 - Often used to make comparisons between different cultures or nations regarding topics like mental health or suicide
 - Not reactive
 - Can be unreliable because there is no control over the already existing data
- Case Studies
 - In-depth analysis of a single case or individual
 - Using structured and open-ended interviews, questionnaires and observation of behaviour
 - Well suited to the examination of rare phenomenon
 - Prone to researcher or subject bias
 - Findings may not be easily generalized to other cases or events
- Qualitative research and discourse analysis
 - Closely related to case studies
 - Discourse analysis is a set of methods used to analyse text- in particular naturally occurring language in order to understand its meaning and significance
 - Language based and communication based
 - Particularly useful in studying prejudice
- Survey research
 - Data collection by survey- can involve structured interviews or a questionnaire
 - Can be used to obtain a large amount of data from a large sample of participants
 - Subject to experimenter bias, subject bias and evaluation apprehension
- Field studies

- Similar to field experiments
- Without any interventions or manipulations
- Involve observation, recording and coding of behaviour as it occurs
- Observer is non-intrusive and 'invisible'

Data Analysis

- Data obtained are transformed into numbers and these numbers are then compared in various formalised ways like statistics.
- Uses *t test* (statistical procedure to test the statistical significance of an effect in which the mean for one condition is greater than the mean for another)
- *Statistical significance*- An effect is statistically significant If statistics reveal that it, or a larger effect, is unlikely to occur by chance more often than 1 in 20 times.

Research Ethics

- Physical Welfare of participants
- Respect for Privacy
- Use of Deception
- Informed Consent
- Debriefing

Theories in Social Psychology

Behaviourism

- Derive from Ivan Pavlov's early work on conditioned reflexes and operant conditioning
- *Neo-behaviourism*- Attempts to explain observable behaviour in terms of reinforcement schedules, without recourse to any intervening unobservable constructs.
- Examples include:
 - Reinforcement-affect model of interpersonal attraction
 - Social exchange theory
 - Social modelling
 - Drive Theory

Cognitive Psychology

- Explanation of behaviour in terms of the way people actively interpret and represent their experiences and the plan action