

PSYC2061 – Social and Developmental Psychology

LECTURE 1 – INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The social psychology of interpersonal behaviour:

Social psychology deals with everyday real life behaviour in an in-depth interesting way. Social psychology is the field of psychology that is the most relevant to everyday life. The aim of social psychology is to develop a critical and sceptical attitude. In this lecture series we are going to go through sociability, social perception (how human beings come to perceive each other and how we come to form impressions of others), social cognition (extension of social perception look into how people go beyond the immediately perceived characteristics of others to make inferences and interpretation about other people) and communication (language and non-verbal communication).

What is Social Psychology?

Baron, Byrne and Suls (1989) “the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behaviour in social situations”

Myers (1990) “the scientific study of how people think about, influence and relate to each other”

Although both above definitions aren't identical they do have similarities which highlight the key features of scientific social psychology:

- Individuals are the unit of analysis
- Commitment to scientific method
- Includes mental as well as behavioural phenomena; social is the mind! What do we mean by this? When we think of social we think of two or more people in each others company but many other situation which are social involve only one person, an individual.

Thought experiment: you are sitting alone in your car and you are on your way to a date – you are thinking about your partner – is this social? Social psychology is the field which also involves studying what goes on in your mind.

Understanding the Social World

Social psychology is therefore fundamentally relevant to how we understand the social world. Studying social psychology does have a number of benefits for rational, reasonable and enlightened living. The most universal feature for humans is *curiosity* (desire to know and understand) and *scepticism* (critical faculties – work out which sorts of explanations are real and which aren't). Curiosity by itself does not guarantee insight. Scepticism is needed. The universal characteristic of curiosity and the need to be sceptical (not universal) together are the secret of improving our understanding of the world and reduce gullibility.

Almost everything we know about the world is second hand information. How do we decide what is true and false? Gullibility is an interesting topic which is emerging in social

psychology. It works to determine why we accept false information. Some examples include fake news and urban myths. Social psychology gives you a reflexive attitude towards the everyday world. Asking questions gives us the ability to develop our critical faculties.

Disciplines that inform Social Psychology

Social psychology is imbedded in many situations that inform our quest to investigate social behaviour. These include:

- Philosophy – ideas about human nature
- History and sociocultural – social life in previous ages is important and relevant to understanding today's social psychology.
- Evolutionary Theory – humans shaped by evolutionary pressures
- Anthropology – social behaviour in other cultures

Social Psychology informs other disciplines

- Understanding the psychology of human behaviour informs economics, politics, criminology, sociology, anthropology, legal studies, etc. these are all domains which require the knowledge of social behaviour. Most clinical problems have a clinical dimension.
- Another interesting link to social psychology is its link to personality (the study of the characteristics of an individual – the way people are has an impact on their social behaviour and vice versa that is, the social situation that an individual is in has an impact on their personality).
- Social variables in turn influence an individual's social behaviour. The social environment dictates how we ought to behave
- Biology vs Environment – we are a biological species this imposes some important characteristics and limitations of how we are supposed to behave in some social situations.

Social Behaviour: Nature vs. Nurture? The anthropological evidence:

This debate regarding nature and nurture is very common in psychology and social psychology. It has an important ideological component that is, it matters what you believe. If you believe in evolutionary/ biological determinism it sets limits to what humans can be expected to do. If you believe that the environment is all important then anything is possible.

A critical study by **Margaret Mead (1940s-50s)** in Samoa regarding this debate. Mead wanted to prove that there is nothing preordained about human social behaviour – it all depends on the environment. She went to Samoa. If she could find one cultural difference between how males and females were expected to behave it would have helped her to establish that gender norms could change according to an individual's environment. She wanted to prove cultural determinism. She asked females questions regarding sex. After taking notes she published a book: *The Coming of Age in Samoa*. In this book she argued that, Samoa is an idealic paradise there are no sexual taboos, adolescence are free of stress and there are no constraints on sexual behaviour. This message was dominant from the 1950s – 1980s, sexual liberation and feminism are some movements who have taken off due to this message during this time.

However, in **1983 Derek Freeman** an Australian anthropologist did field work in Samoa to reinforce Mead's conception. To his great surprise he found that almost nothing that Mead found was true. He found that Samoan culture has a huge emphasis on female virginity than Western culture and had higher instances of juvenile delinquency, sexual violence and suicide. He published a book: *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. This book was universally hated and Freeman was condemned. How could two anthropologists come up with completely different interpretation on the same reality. Freeman went back and contacted Mead's informants it turned out that these young woman were extremely shy about Mead's questioning. They were making up stories because it is what she wanted to hear.

Implication: human social behaviour is strongly influenced by universal psychological and biological foundations. Both nature and nurture.

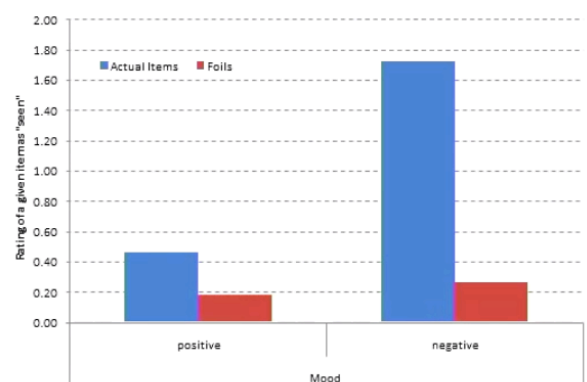
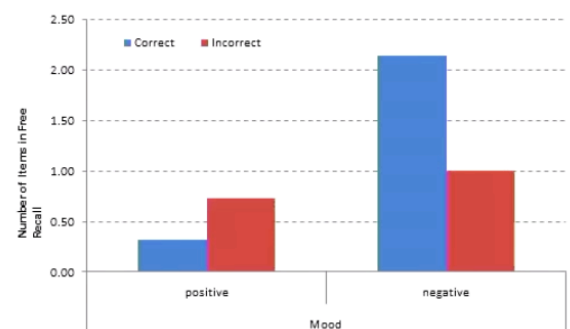
Understanding Social Behaviour: Social Psychology vs Common Sense

- One of the most common criticisms of social psychology is that the content is common sense. Is this true? In a superficial sense, we are all amateur social psychologists. We possess everyday knowledge about the social world.
- The problem with this knowledge is that it is not scientific and precise.
- We can demonstrate this by saying that everything and the opposite of everything is true *some of the time; think about proverbs!* E.g. "out of sight out of mind" vs. "absence makes the heart grow fonder"; "haste makes waste" vs. "he who hesitates is lost." You need to tell social psychology to tell you which precise situation calls for which proverb.
- With hindsight, some research finding can appear 'obvious.' Yet: many findings are counterintuitive.

Social Psychology and Everyday Life

Many things are not obvious – The Corner Shop Study (Forgas et al. JESP, 2009). Which investigated how does positive or negative induced mood influences memory? How does weather influence your memory? The study was taken out in a natural setting, mixed corner shop and 10 unusual objects were scattered in places around the newsagency. On a day that was bright and sunny they interviewed people who left the shop and asked them whether they identified any of these unusual items and how many of them they could remember. Mood induction was done using the weather and music in the shop and the dependent variable was how well the participants remember.

Results of the study indicated superior recognition and recall when they were in a negative mood (rainy weather). This was consistent with negative affect promoting more attentive and accommodating processing (Fiedler, Bless).



Understanding Social Behaviour: Social Psychology vs Common Sense

- Common Sense Wisdom? All the below statements when read superficially will appear true:
 - Working while in high school will help students build character and value money
 - Children who read a lot are not very social or physically fit
 - People with low self-esteem are more aggressive
 - The best way to treat juvenile delinquents is to get tough with them
 - Most psychopaths are delusional
 - We know what makes us happy
- However, not a single one of these is true. Scientific evidence refutes each of the common sense claims listed above.

Common Sense and Science Differ in the sense that:

- Science works to find causal connections and specify conditions – what causes, what when and why?
- Common sense often mistaken, cannot distinguish between coincidence, correlation and causality. E.g. my aunt drank herbal tea and her cold disappeared.
- Much common sense knowledge is actually wrong. E.g. alternative therapies, homeopath, anecdotal evidence for cures, diets, etc.

The Social Psychology of Gullibility

- Why do people believe weird things? One way to explain gullibility has been done by **Daniel Kahnemann** distinguished between two types of mental procedure which we use to understand reality, which he calls System 1 and System 2 Thinking. System 1 Thinking is the ancient way of thinking, the thinking which involves anecdotal evidence and analogies – until recently this was the dominant way of thing. This way of thinking is effortless and lazy. System 2 Thinking is the analytical, rational and scientific way of thinking – looking for alternatives and different explanations.
- **Harari** argues that the human ability to accept uncritically fictional explanations is an important part of our make-up. Throughout history it is fiction that allowed large groups to cooperate. E.g. some religions may think that Kings have extra powers.
- Do we want to be gullible?
 - *Confirmation bias* – human tendency to confirm what we already think – selectively search for information that confirms our belief and ignore information which goes against our belief
 - *Self-serving bias* involves thinking about the world in ways which is comfortable to us and ignore ways which are uncomfortable
 - *Gossip and Rumour* are unchecked by anything, the truth isn't established and are often not checked because the claims are uncheckable.
- Gullibility is exploited in marketing and politics.

Philosophical Roots

- What is human nature like? Social philosophy since Plato and Aristotle times. *Simple and Sovereign* theories were used to explain human nature:
 - *Hedonism* – idea that humans can be simplified into creatures that seek pleasure and avoid pain

- *Altruism* – human beings are born with a natural tendency to help and be kind to each other
 - *Rationalism* – the defining feature of human beings is their unique ability of rational thought
 - *Stoicism* – idea that we recognise the inherent difficulties, problems and cruelties of the world and we don't expect any better.
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LECTURE 2 – NATURE OF HUMAN SOCIABILITY

- Explosive growth since the 1960s
- A uniquely Western product
- Arose out of Western individualism, enlightenment and empiricism. It is because of Western behaviour human social behaviour has become an issue that needs to be studied.
- Eastern philosophy and religion have much to say about the human condition, but this has remained speculative. Eastern social psychology has not become empirical.
- Or- perhaps it is only modern individualistic Western cultures that social life became problematic, and the subject of study?!

Historical and Evolutionary Roots

- Human sociability is shaped by evolutionary and historical forces
- Modern human brains evolved to adapt to stone-age circumstances
- Biologically, we are still stone-age. Until the 18th century humans used to live in small groups. These groups had certain characteristics:
 - These groups were based on face-to-face interactions. Humans used to live their entire lives with each other in a small village. The only time, modern humans have anything resembling this was during high school where we develop a group identity and experience. Now, there is an anonymous mass society e.g. in university.
- This all changed in the 18th century where the period known as enlightenment led to the breakdown of small groups.

How does our past influence current social behaviour?