

## Week 1: Introduction to Social Psychology

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### Introduction to PSYC20009

- **PSYC20009:**
  - Subject focusing on the broad grounding in basics of personality and social psychology (and some statistical methods):
  - Systematic and comprehensive.
  - Yet, focus is on topics of broad appeal and importance.
- **Personality psychology:**
  - Understand how people differ in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
  - Focuses on the person as the locus of explanation.
  - How do stable individual differences influence thought, feeling and action?
- **Social psychology:**
  - Understand how social situations influence people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
  - Focuses on the situation as the locus of explanation.
  - How does the social context influence thought, feeling and action?
- Both personality and social psychology:
  - Have similar questions but different approaches.
  - Are grounded in empirical research.
  - Are broad disciplines with fuzzy boundaries that blend into other areas (biological, cognitive, developmental...) and into each other.

### What is social psychology?

- **Social:** pertaining to other people, society, or community.
- **Psychology:** scientific study of the human mind and behaviour.
- **Social psychology:**
  - Scientific study of the human mind and behaviour in the social context (i.e., contexts characterised by the presence of other people, both real and imagined).
  - Also, the scientific study of the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way people perceive, influence, and relate to others (Smith et al., 2015).
- Social psychological thought has a long history but mostly not empirical/scientific:
  - Plato – 'crowd mind' (4<sup>th</sup> century BC).
  - Le Bon and Canetti – crowd psychology (19<sup>th</sup> century).
- As an empirical discipline, it emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

- Cf. history of psychology.
- Cf. social/political history of 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Contemporary concerns:
  - Theory and method – integration with biology, neuroscience, and computer science:
    - Evolutionary social psychology.
    - Embodiment.
    - Social neuroscience.
    - Computational social psychology and big data.
  - Practice: replication ‘crisis’ and response.

### Core themes and features

- **‘They saw a game’ case study:**
  - American football match between Princeton and Dartmouth.
  - Princeton football player, Dick Kazmaier, was about to retire.
  - It was a rough and violent game.
  - Two different interpretations from two sides of the story:
    - ‘This observer has never seen quite such a disgusting exhibition of so-called “sport”. Both teams were guilty but the blame must be laid primarily on Dartmouth’s doorstep. Princeton, obviously the better team, had no reason to rough up Dartmouth. Looking at the situation rationally, we don’t see why the Indians should make a deliberate attempt to cripple Dick Kazmaier or any other Princeton player. The Dartmouth psychology, however, is not rational itself’.
    - ‘Did Princeton players feel so badly about losing their star? They shouldn’t have. During the past undefeated campaign they stopped several individual stars by a concentrated effort, including such mamstays as Frank Hauff of Navy, Glenn Adams of Pennsylvania and Rocco Calvo of Cornell. In other words, the same brand of football condemned by the Prince—that of stopping the big man—is practiced quite successfully by the Tigers’.
  - ‘In brief, the data here indicate that there is no such “thing” as a “game” existing “out there” in its own right which people merely “observe”. The “game” “exists” for a person and is experienced by him only in so far as certain happenings have significances in terms of his purpose’.
  - The case study demonstrated that people may experience the same things or events but interpret these differently from each other.

- **Core tenets:**
  - People construct their own reality (within limits). Their identities, beliefs, attitudes, values... influence their perception of the world.
  - *Construction of reality*: axiom that each person's view of reality is a construction, shaped both by cognitive processes (the ways human minds work) and by social processes (input from others either actually present or imagined).
  - *Social influence*: pervasive (and powerful). Other people (real and imagined; present or not) influence what people think, feel, and do.
  - *Pervasiveness of social influence*: axiom that other people influence virtually all thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, whether those others are physically present or not.
- **Core motivations:**
  - *Striving for mastery*: motivation principle suggesting that people seek to understand and predict events in the social world to obtain rewards. Refers to understanding, control and seeking meaning.
  - *Seeking connectedness*: motivation principle suggesting that people seek support, liking, and acceptance from the people and groups they care about and value. Refers to belonging, relatedness and trust.
  - *Valuing 'me and mine'*: motivation principle suggesting that people desire to see themselves, and other people and groups connected to themselves, in a positive light. Refers to self-enhancement and positive self-esteem.
- **Core processing principles:**
  - *Conservatism*: beliefs and opinions are slow to change.
  - *Accessibility*: accessible information has the most impact on thought, feeling, and action.
    - **Mind** as an associative network.
    - Some network elements are more active than others.
    - These influence ongoing thought, feeling and action.
  - *Processing depth*: information can be processed with various levels of depth.
    - Automatic vs. controlled processes.
    - **'System 1 vs. system 2' thinking**: fast, instinctive thinking vs. slow, deliberate thinking.

## Methods

- If the goal of social psychology is to understand and explain human social thought, feeling and action, then how do researchers go about doing that?
  - Introspect (cf. 'strangers to ourselves').
  - Mere observation of others (cf. biased observers).
  - Reason from first principles (cf. not very good/biased reasoners).
  - Authorities – religious, secular (cf. they are biased too).
- **Scientific method:**
  - Systematic observation combined with inductive reasoning.
  - Aim is to provide causal, mechanistic explanations of phenomena (or of social psychological phenomena in social psychology).
  - Used to construct and test theories.
- Overview of the **scientific method:**
  - *Observe*: something about the world – through the senses, through engagement with prior theories.
  - *Hypothesise*: proffer a tentative explanation for observation.
  - *Test*: derive prediction from hypothesis and test (usually with an experiment).
  - *Infer*: make (inductive) inference about hypothesis based on test outcome.
  - *Repeat/revise*: if hypothesis supported, repeat; if not, modify hypothesis and test revised hypothesis.
- **Theories:**
  - System of ideas with the intention of explaining something.
  - Regard abstract constructs, which need to be measured (operationalised) in terms of observable/measurable qualities.
  - *Construct validity*:
    - Extent to which manipulations and measures correspond to theoretical constructs.
    - Achieved via selecting appropriate measures and using multiple measures.
  - Also seek causal explanations, which require the high-quality experiments to be conducted.
  - *Internal validity*:
    - Extent to which casual inference (independent variable → dependent variable) is justified.
    - Achieved via manipulation and random assignment.
  - Also seek generalising explanations, which mean that the evidence from experiments can be generalised to other people, places, times, and settings.
  - *External validity*: