

TOPIC 1 – What is Social Psychology?

1. How is social psychology defined, and how is it similar/different to other research areas?

Definition of Social Psychology

- Social Psychology is the scientific study of how individuals think, feel, and behave in a social context.
- It examines:
 - How the real, imagined, or implied presence of others influences us.
 - Both individual and group-level behaviors.
- Core focus: Understanding how and why people are influenced by others.

Social Psychology vs. Other Disciplines

Understanding individual within context of a group – recurring theme

Field	Focus
Sociology	Broad social structures, institutions, group behavior.
Personality Psych.	Traits and individual differences across situations.
Cognitive Psych.	Thought processes, perception, memory.
Clinical Psych.	Mental illness, treatment of psychological disorders.

- Social Psychology bridges multiple areas—examines how social context interacts with internal processes.

2. What is the person-situation interaction, and why is it important to social psychology?

Themes in Social Psychology – Power of the Situation

- Behavior is often strongly influenced by situational factors, even more than personal traits.
- Example: Milgram's obedience study shows people follow authority, even when doing harm.
- Emphasizes the interaction between individual traits (person) and situational context (situation).

3. How does social psychology differentiate between cognition, affect, and behavior?

Themes in Social Psychology – Automatic vs. Controlled Processes

- **Social Cognition:** Thought processes—how people interpret and remember social info.
- **Affect:** Emotions and feelings influencing social perception and interaction.
- **Behavior:** Observable actions influenced by both cognition and affect.
- **Processes:**
 - **Automatic:** Fast, unconscious, effortless.
 - **Controlled:** Slow, deliberate, effortful.

4. What is the belonging hypothesis, and what role does it play in social psychology?

Themes – Self-Esteem Maintenance & Social Belonging

- People are motivated to:
 - Maintain a positive self-image.
 - Feel accepted and connected with others.
- **Belonging Hypothesis:** The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation that shapes perception, emotion, and behavior.

5. How is ostracism defined, and what are the major findings regarding this concept?

Ostracism (Implied from Belonging Theme)

- **Ostracism:** Being ignored or excluded by others.