Textbook notes

Week 2, Chapter 2: social cognition and social thinking

Social psychology and cognition
- Social psychology: studies how human thought, feeling and behaviour is influenced by and has influence on others
- Thought therefore has a major role
  - Thought: internal language and symbols, conscious
  - Cognition: mental processing that is largely automatic and unaware
  - Both are inferred from behaviour
- Social cognition: cognitive processes and structures that influence and are influenced by social behaviour

History of cognition in social psych
- Wilhelm - Introspection
- Skinner – behaviourism and focus on observable, neglect of mental processes
- 1960s – cognition came back along with focus on information processing
- development continued with computer revolution with computer as metaphor for mind
- cognition and thought now centre stage of social psychology
- cognitive emphasis in social psych has four guises
  - cognitive consistency
    - people are motivated to reduce discrepancies
    - this was disproved as people are tolerant of inconsistencies
  - naïve scientist
    - people need to attribute causes to behaviour to perceive meaning
    - people basically rational and any errors are due to incorrect info or motivational reasons such as self interest
    - however this was disproved
  - cognitive miser
    - people have limited cognitive capacity
    - these biases are intrinsic to social thinking
  - motivated tactician
    - people have multiple cognitive strategies available from which they choose on the basis of personal goals, motivations and needs
- Social neuroscience: exploration of brain activity using FMRI to understand activity associated with social cognition and social psychological processes and phenomena

Forming impressions of others
- Ashs's Configural model

- o In forming first impressions, we latch onto central traits (traits that have a disproportional influence on impressions, while other pieces of information called peripheral traits have less influence
  - o Warm/cold= central trait
  - o Centrality of traits rests on its intrinsic degree of correlation with other traits
  - o One study revealed the word warm had more positive effect
  - o Lecturers rated more positively as warm
- Biases in forming impressions
  - o Primacy and recency
    - Primacy: earlier information presented has disproportionate influence on social cognition
    - Recency: later presented information has disproportionate influence on social cognition due to distractions
    - Primacy effects are more common
  - o Positivity and negativity
    - When we receive no information we are likely to assume the best
    - Negative information attracts our attention – we are biased towards negativity due to
      - Unusual and distinctive
      - Signifies potential danger, survival quality
    - Once formed a negative opinion, difficult to change
  - o Personal constructs and implicit personality theories
    - Personal constructs: personal ways of characterising others – ie humour or intelligence
      - Difficult to change
    - Implicit personality theories: ways of characterising others and explaining their behaviour
      - Assumptions about what sort of characteristics go together
      - Also difficult to change
  - o Physical appearance counts
    - Interior beauty: a spiritual and moral beauty
    - Taller men paid more
    - More attractive men considered more able
    - More attractive women considered less able
  - o Stereotypes
    - Widely shared and simplified evaluative image of a social group and its members
  - o Social judgeability
    - Perception of whether its socially acceptable to judge a specific target
    - Less likely to judge people whom are considered politicly incorrect

Cognitive algebra
- Impression formation: integration of information about a person into a whole

- Cognitive algebra: approach to the study of impression formation that focuses on how people combine attributes that have valence into an overall positive or negative impression
- Three models
  - Summation: forming impressions by summing the valence of all the constituent person attributes.
    - Cumulative sum of each piece of info
  - Averaging: forming impressions by the cumulative average of each piece of information
    - Research favours this model
    - Ie negative info may be weighted more heavily
  - Weighted average: context may influence the importance of information. Therefore a weighted average allows you to form impressions by first weighting and then averaging the information
    - Similar to Ash's central trait theory except weighted average, a central trait is simply just more salient, whereas for ash, a central trait influences the other traits
    - Ashs's perspective is descriptive/qualitative
    - Cognitive algebra is quantitative

Social schemas and categories
- Schema: cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or stimulus
- Certain cues activate a schema
- Makes sense of things based on limited information – top down, concept driven processing
- Types of schemas
  - Person schemas: individualised knowledge about people
  - Role schemas: knowledge structures about role occupants
    - Roles: patterns of behaviours within a group
  - Script: schema about an event
  - Content free schemas: rules for processing info – ie if I like tom and he likes Ben, I should also like Ben
  - Self schemas: store of information about themselves
  - Stereotype: schema about a social group. Form the self-concept

Categories and prototypes
- To apply schematic knowledge you must first categorise someone
- Categories: collections of instances that have family resemblance
- Relationships among categories is hierarchal
- Ways in which we categorise
  - Prototypes: cognitive representations of a category – standards by which family resemblance are measured. Categories are fuzzy sets of features organised around a prototype
    - Schemas and prototypes are similar but prototypes are fuzzy, and schemas are organised
  - Basic level categories: intermediate level categories, not too inclusive or exclusive
    - the default option