Introducing Social Psychology

Theories and Methods in Social Psychology

27 Feb 2012, Banu Cingöz Ulu
What is social psychology?

• A field within psychology that strives to understand the social dynamics of everyday living.

• Social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to others.
What is social psychology?

• How do the **actual**, **imagined**, and **implied** presence of others influence us?
  – Cognitively (thoughts)
  – Affectively (emotions)
  – Behaviorally (actions)

• Three levels of analysis:
  – societal (economics, sociology) ← **BROAD**
  – individual (clinical, personality) ← **NARROW**
  – interpersonal ← **INTERMEDIATE**: situations

This is the level of analysis for Social Psychology
Social Psychology is...more than common sense

- It is a collaborative, integrative science.
  - Drawing on insights from sociology, anthropology, biology, neurology, political science, and economics to describe and explain social behavior

**Psychological Social Psychology:** focus is on individuals and how they respond to social stimuli.

**Sociological Social Psychology:** focus is on larger group or societal variables, such as socioeconomic status, social and cultural norms.
Historical Roots of Social Psychology

Three major theoretical perspectives have influenced today’s social psychology:

• Psychoanalytic theory
• Behaviorism
• Gestalt psychology
Historical Roots of Social Psychology

- **Psychoanalytic Theory**: Freud’s theory emphasizing unconscious motivation.
- **Behaviorism**: analysis of learning that focuses on observed behavior.
- **Gestalt Psychology**: Theory that people form coherent and meaningful perceptions based on the whole, not individual parts.
THEORIES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
Theories in Social Psychology 1

1. Motivational
2. Learning
3. Cognitive
4. Decision-Making
5. Interdependence
6. Sociocultural
7. Evolutionary
Theories in Social Psychology 2

1. Motivational Theories: focuses on a person’s motivations, needs, emotions

2. Learning Theories: emphasize prior experience, observations, and reinforcements
   - **Social learning theory**: argues that learning is based on reinforcement and modeling
   - **Reinforcement**: learning based on attaining rewards (or avoiding punishments)
   - **Modeling**: imitating or copying others
3. Cognitive Theories: a person’s behavior depends on perception & interpretation of situations

4. Decision-Making Theories: people rationally calculate the costs and benefits of various action

- **Expectancy value theory**: decisions are based on (1) the value of outcomes and (2) the probability each will occur.
Theories in Social Psychology 4

5. Interdependence Theories: focus on interacting people, 2 or more individuals
   - Two people are *interdependent* when their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have mutual influence
   - Social exchange theory: analyzes interactions in terms of costs and benefits that they exchange
Theories in Social Psychology 5

6. Sociocultural Theories

- A sociocultural perspective emphasizes how behavior is influenced by cultural values, social norms, and social roles.

- **Culture**: shared beliefs, values, traditions, and behavior patterns of a group.

- **Socialization**: process of acquiring the rules, standards, and values of a group.

- **Social Norms**: rules and expectations about how group members should behave.

- **Social Role**: set of social norms about how a person in a particular social position should behave.
Culture shapes social behavior

- Culture: All ideas, symbols, preferences, and material objects a people share
  - Shapes people’s view of reality and of themselves
  - Significantly influences individual’s social behavior
- Cultural belief systems of **individualism** and **collectivism**
Theories in Social Psychology 7

- **Individualism**: belief in the value of personal identity, uniqueness, and freedom
  - Westernized White cultures

- **Collectivism**: emphasis on loyalty to the family, adherence to group norms, and harmonious social relations
  - African, Asian, Latin and Eastern cultures
Individualism:

• A philosophy of life focusing on individual needs over group needs.
  – Preference for loosely knit social relationships
  – Desire to be relatively autonomous of other’s influence
  – First seen in sixteenth century when people became more geographically mobile
  – Expanded greatly in late 19th and early 20th centuries due to increased industry and urbanization
Collectivism:

- A philosophy of life stressing the priority of group needs over individual needs.
  - Preference for tightly knit social relationships
  - Willingness to submit to the influence of group
  - Identity is given to you by the group
  - Approximately 70% of world’s population lives in a collectivist orientation
  - Older of the two philosophies: most protection for people who live in threatening environments
# Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity is based in the social system and given by one’s group.</td>
<td>Identity is based in the individual and achieved by one’s own striving.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People are socialized to be emotionally dependent on organizations and institutions.</td>
<td>People are socialized to be emotionally independent of organizations and institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal and group goals are generally consistent; and when inconsistent, group goals get priority.</td>
<td>Personal and group goals are often inconsistent, and when inconsistent, personal goals get priority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People explain others’ social behavior as being more determined by social norms and roles than by personal attitudes.</td>
<td>People explain others’ social behavior as being more determined by personal attitudes than by social norms and roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis is on belonging to organizations, and membership is the ideal.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on individual initiative, individual achievement, and leadership is the ideal.</td>
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<td>Trust is placed in group decisions.</td>
<td>Trust is placed in individual decisions.</td>
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</tbody>
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7. Evolutionary Social Psychology

- applies the principles of evolution and natural selection to the understanding of human behavior and social life
- many tendencies /preferences of humans are the result of natural selection >> “evolved psychological mechanisms”
- behavior based on internal dispositions and external situational demands
- many evolved mechanisms are social in nature
Social Psychological Theories Today

• Combines and integrates different theoretical traditions

• “middle-range theories”: They are models to explain specific aspects of human behavior
  – They do not try to cover all social life
METHODS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
Methods in SP

• **Scientific method:** A set of procedures used to gather, analyze, and interpret information.
  – Reduces error
  – Leads to dependable generalizations

• **Four broad goals of research:**
  – Description
  – Causal analysis
  – Theory building
  – Application
Research Participants

• Select a sample that ideally represents the population of interest

• Random sampling is the best way to do that

• Biases:
  – College students are over-represented
  – Males are over-represented
  – Ethnic minority groups are under-represented
Correlational vs. Experimental Research 1

- **Correlational research**: involves testing the association between two or more factors, i.e., variables

- Advantages:
  - Study real-life complex problems (earthquake, death of spouse)
  - Efficient and economic

- Disadvantages:
  - Reverse causality
  - Third variable
Correlational vs. Experimental Research 2

• **Experimental research**: randomly assigns people to conditions, varies treatment in each condition, and measures effect on responses
  – examine and conclude about cause-effect relationships

• **Operational definition**: the specific procedure used to measure or manipulate a variable.

• **Random assignment**: the subjects are placed in experimental conditions on the basis of chance.
Correlational vs. Experimental Research 3

- **Independent** and **dependent** variables

**Independent variable:** the variable that is systematically manipulated

**Dependent variable:** the variable whose changes are considered to be the result of the changes in the independent variable, the “measured variable”
Experimental Research 1

- **Field experiments** are run in naturalistic settings and usually participants are not aware they are being studied
  - generally more spontaneous, natural responses; more **external validity**
  - minimize suspicion of participants
  - less control over extraneous variables: threat to **internal validity**
  - sometimes random assignment not possible
Experimental Research 2

• **Laboratory experiments** are run in artificial, controlled settings
  – better control of experimental manipulations
  – *random assignment* is possible
    • removes preexisting differences between groups
  – some degree of artificiality, external validity problems
Experimental Research 3

• **External validity**: extent to which results of a study generalize to other populations and settings

• **Internal validity**: extent to which cause-and-effect conclusions can be drawn
Methods of Data Collection

• Self-Report – people are asked about their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, preferences
• Observational Research – direct observation or recording of information
• Archival Research – analyze existing data collected for other purposes
• Internet Research – could be self report, observational, or archival; but over the net
Sources of Bias

• **Experimenter bias:** caused by unintentional acts by the researcher to influence the participants to behave in a certain way

• **Subject bias:** caused by participant’s motives and goals, wanting to fulfill the role of a “goods subject”
  
  – **Demand characteristics:** aspects of research that make people aware that they are being studied and this can bias their behavior
Replication and Meta-analysis

• **Replication**: No study is ever perfect, results should be replicated; meaning the study must be repeated

• **Meta-Analysis**: quantitative approach to summarizing results of many studies.