

# Introducing Social Psychology

Theories and Methods in Social  
Psychology

# 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

# Theories in Social Psychology 3

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.

# Theories in Social Psychology 6

## **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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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



**TABLE 1.3**

## Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Cultures

### Collectivist

Identity is based in the social system and given by one's group.

People are socialized to be emotionally dependent on organizations and institutions.

Personal and group goals are generally consistent; and when inconsistent, group goals get priority.

People explain others' social behavior as being more determined by social norms and roles than by personal attitudes.

Emphasis is on belonging to organizations, and membership is the ideal.

Trust is placed in group decisions.

### Individualist

Identity is based in the individual and achieved by one's own striving.

People are socialized to be emotionally independent of organizations and institutions.

Personal and group goals are often inconsistent, and when inconsistent, personal goals get priority.

People explain others' social behavior as being more determined by personal attitudes than by social norms and roles.

Emphasis is on individual initiative, individual achievement, and leadership is the ideal.

Trust is placed in individual decisions.

# Theories in Social Psychology 8

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 "good 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.