Overview and History of Social Psychology (F07)

• The film, *Constructing Social Reality* follows today's lecture

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

• “SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IS THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF HOW THE THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND BEHAVIOR OF INDIVIDUALS ARE INFLUENCED BY THE ________, IMAGINED, OR ________ PRESENCE OF OTHERS.”
  - GORDON ALLPORT, 1985

__________    ____________
All-encompassing

• Social psychology seemed to me to apply to most of human behavior, making it irresistible

• Social psychology also forms the bases for many other psychological areas
  – Clinical Psychology relies on social behavior to make diagnoses
  – Borderline personality, schizophrenia, paranoia are diagnosed on the basis of how someone behaves toward others
  – Abnormal social behavior → psychopathology

Personality Psychology

*Personality is assessed by how we act toward others:*

  The Circumplex Model

Describes personality on two independent axes (dominance/warmth)

Applied Social Areas

• Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology
• Health Psychology

• So, social psychology plays an instrumental role in the way other psychologists do business
• Now, let’s look more closely at social psychology, and the levels at which researchers investigate and analyze human behavior

Levels of Analysis

The 4 levels are:

Societal (or Cultural)

Inter-Group

Interpersonal

Individual

Overlap with other fields

• Societal and inter-group level of analyses: sociology, anthropology
  – There are sociological “social psychologists”
  – Methods are different
• Sociologists/anthropologists do more theorizing based on case studies
  – Field studies, surveys
  - Publish in different journals

The 2 specialty levels of Social Psychologists:

• Interpersonal

• ___________

  Important!

• Even though social psychologists study behavior at the level of the individual, they are almost always concerned with making group-level predictions (note: this doesn’t mean “groups” as a level of analysis)
• The data are aggregated over a number of people to test hypotheses
• They rarely do “case studies” in other words – which are more often used by other social scientists

Generalizability

• Why (don’t we do case studies)?
• We like to generalize our findings to many people, rather than predict how one specific person will behave in a specific situation
• Therefore, the data speak to the likelihood of how people (in general) will respond, rather than simply describe how person X reacts
• As a result, we prefer to study large samples of people and aggregate the numbers

  Who are social psychologists?
• PhD in Psychology a must
• Most often found in academic settings
  – Teach and do research
  – Often altruistic (interested in social problems, and finding solutions to same)
• Alternative routes are business
  – Market research/Opinion Polling
  – Business Schools
• Industry
  – I/O is applied social psychology
  – Personnel decisions, worker satisfaction/motivation

  How do you become one?
• Graduate work is essential
  – GPA
  – GRE scores (Graduate Record Exam)
• Get involved in research as an undergrad
  – The sooner the better
  – Research credits/experience are important
  – As are letters from academic researchers with whom you have worked

  What kind of research?
• Methodologically, there is a strong bias in favor of ______________ laboratory research
  – Randomly assign people to conditions (e.g., control vs. treatment) and then observe the treatment’s effect on behavior
• But social psychologists also conduct correlational research (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, even field studies)
• Sometimes social psychologists even do content analyses (e.g., archival research)

• You can also break down social psychological research by the researchers’ motives:
• ______________
• ______________
Applied Research: Seeks knowledge that addresses ____________________

Basic Research: Conducted for the sake of knowledge alone

“There is nothing so practical as a good theory” – Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin
• “_________________________”
• Believed in Action Research
  – Research aimed at social progress
  – Believed social psychologists should be agents for change
• “The world is my laboratory”
• Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)

History of Social Psychology
• Still a young science
• Began to flourish during __________
  – German social scientists (like Lewin) fled Nazi Germany
• Interested in scientifically studying prejudice, especially anti-Semitism
• But also conformity and persuasion
  – Why did the German people go along with Hitler?
  – How did the Nazi regime persuade so many?

Attitudes
• Note the focus on attitudes
  – The scientific study of attitudes is social psychology’s purview, even to this day
• Carl __________
  – During WWII, worked for the U.S. Army making indoctrination films
  – Post WWII, set up the first scientific attitude lab at Yale
• Leon __________
  – Set up the second attitude lab (U of MN)
  – Cognitive dissonance theory – attitude change processes (the most famous social psych theory)
Social Psychology Today
• Every major Psychology Department in the U.S. has a Social Area
• Academic libraries always carry our journals
  – Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
  – Journal of Experimental Social Psychology
  – Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
• It has also grown internationally (European Society for Experimental Social Psychology)

Social Psychology Network
• To learn more, visit http://www.socialpsychology.org/
• Maintained by Scott Plous at Wesleyan
  – Visit home pages of social psychologists
  – Participate in web-based research projects
  – Browse journals and texts
  – Find links to topic areas (e.g., conformity, aggression, prejudice)

Laypersons’ Social Psych
• Many of social psychology’s topics are those that most of us have had day-to-day experience with
• We are all “naïve” social psychologists
• This might make us think social psychologists “prove the obvious”
  – Isn’t it mostly common sense?
  – Why do we need research to tell us why people fall in love? How people explain events? Or how best to influence others?
• Let’s try a class demonstration

Demonstration

___________ Bias
• “I knew it all along” effect
• Once we have learned the facts of a case, we tend to believe we knew it all along
• This can make us think (erroneously) that nobody needed to do the research!
• How do we know about _________ bias?
• Research!
• Here are some examples

Control Group

• Potatoes are native to
  – Peru
  – Ireland

• Aladdin was born in
  – Persia
  – China

• Aardvarks eat mostly
  – Ants
  – Termites

• Note your answer
• Write down how confident you are in your answer (e.g., 50% means either answer could be right)

Experimental Group

• Potatoes are native to
  – Peru
  – Ireland

• Aladdin was born in
  – Persia
  – China

• Aardvarks eat mostly
  – Ants
  – Termites

• Write down how confident you are that you would have known the answer, had we not told you in advance (e.g., 50% means you would have thought that either answer could be right)

Confidence ratings

Who was more confident that they “knew it along” (circle one):

Control group

Experimental Group

Who will win 1985 Super Bowl?
People (circle one) could / could not remember who they thought would win the game
Similar findings when:

- People were asked to predict outcome of O.J. Simpson trial, and the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearing
  - Subjects’ pre-verdict estimates differed from post-verdict memories of what their estimates were

- Political contests
  - Asked in September 2000
  - Who will win the election in Nov.?
  - By what percentage of voters?

Results: Showed that people could not remember what they had thought the outcome would be before the election

In sum

- Hindsight bias is our tendency to exaggerate our ability to have foreseen how something would turn out after learning the outcome.
- Research shows it not only exists, but gets worse over time
  - As our memories fade, so does our ability to accurately recall what we thought would happen in the first place

- Hindsight bias is a strong argument for why we need research (and can’t just rely on common sense)

Historical Wisdom

- Why can’t we just rely on ancient wisdom to tell us about human behavior?
- After all, humans have been around for centuries – shouldn’t our “best minds” be able to tell us the truth?
- Let’s try it out

  Who is Right?
  (Just listen to the examples)
Wisdom is ___________!

• Wisdom alone cannot even answer the most basic of questions
  – Who to be friends with
  – How to attract someone
  – Whether actions follow thoughts, or thoughts justify actions
  – Whether reason or emotions are more persuasive when we argue our case

Enter Social Psychology

• This is why we need a __________ of human social behavior
• As young as it is, it has already made some outstanding contributions to our ability to predict how (and when) people behave the way they do

Film: “Constructing Social Reality”

• The films introduce us to two constant themes in social psychology
  #1 - The power of the situation over personality differences to explain human behavior
  #2 = The ways in which people’s attitudes and beliefs shape their reality
    – In a very real sense, people construct their own realities
    – Even people who live through the same event experience it very differently
    – Our subjective “truths” can feel extremely ____________, which makes them hard to see