

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 "naï ve" 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