

Social Psychology Introduction

Understanding Social Behaviour

Three Processing Principles Established views are slow to change (**conservatism**). Accessible information has the most impact (**accessibility**). Processing is sometimes superficial but at other times goes in to great depth (**superficiality**).

Two Fundamental Axioms People construct their own reality (e.g. Princeton vs. Dartmouth). Social influence is pervasive (e.g. Sherif).

Three Motivational Principles People strive for **mastery** (understand & predict). People seek **connectedness**. People **value me and mine** (things belonging to us are viewed more positively).

Common Sense

A classic criticism of Social Psychology is that it is 'common sense'. This is used as a sort of 'value judgment' by which to disregard its practice.

However, just as research can support a common sense view, it can also disprove it. This research is necessary to espouse 'common sense' in a scientific remit. Otherwise, research may be biased, subjective and unsystematic.

It is important to avoid the **hindsight bias** when performing research (exaggerating after learning an outcome one's ability to have foreseen how that outcome would have turned out). This can be likened to 'common sense' in that it purports a kind of 'I knew it all along' layperson, arrogance.

Vul, Pashler et al. (2008) suggest that even professional scientists are guilty of these hindsight biases. They suggest that neuroimaging rarely has a reliability of over .7 (test-retest) and personality measures are rarely above .8. This means that measures correlating the two should never really exceed .74. However, they are often reported. This is arguably because neuroimagers select voxels that exhibit the effect being looked for. They found that a significant majority of the studies cited showed meaningless correlations.

Definitions

"The scientific study of the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence and relate to others" **Smith & Mackie**

"The scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others" **(Allport, 1954)**

This differs from sociology in that it emphasises the **social behaviour of an individual in a group** and differs from clinical and cognitive psychology in that it studies groups as a cause rather than individual disorders or mental structure.

History

The first experimental investigation came from Norman **Triplett** (1898) (an American) and his investigation into **social facilitation** (as measured by cyclists). However, Ringelmann (1913) (a European) later noted the effect of **social loafing** (as measured by force exerted in a tug of war).

Kurt Lewin's Famous Equation $B=f(P,E)$ emphasised an equal role of the environmental and the personality. However, Furnham noted that 20 PhDs have been written on whether there is a greater or lesser effect of personality or the environment.

Behaviourism's arguments suggested that people behaved according to learned associations between stimuli and responses (classical) and that behaviours are enforced or punished (operants), causing them to be more or less likely to occur, respectively.

Lashley however noted rats "thinking outside the box" using **cognitive maps** (internal, mental representations) and locating the food source outside of the maze. **Tolman** noted evidence of **latent learning** whereby rats rewarded the least, reduced their performance least.

Cognitive Revolution (the study of memory, attention and information processing) perhaps emphasised the 'black context' in which the mind became the forefront of psychological investigation. Internal states are likened to computing processes and these processes are what enables us to make social judgments.