



Theories in social psychology: A Review

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Abstract

Most contemporary volumes on social psychology emphasize applied research, while neglecting to address the important theories that shape the discipline. A deeper understanding of the theoretical framework that underlies social psychology allows researchers the opportunity to reflect on current work and become inspired for future areas of enquiry.

Theories in Social Psychology addresses this substantial deficiency in current literature by bringing together the work of a range of distinguished scholars who have written critically within the area of social psychology. Twelve social psychological theories relating to social cognition, social comparison, social reinforcement, and self are critically discussed in depth: cognitive dissonance, reactance, attribution, social comparison, relative deprivation, equity, interdependency social identity, social categorization, self-perception, symbolic interactions, and impression management.

Key words: social, psychology, Theories, cognitive etc.

Introduction

Psychology is a discipline that focuses on the study of human mind and behavior. It attempts to understand and explain the way a human thinks, feels, and acts. Philosophy and biology are the two major roots of psychology. In fact the discussion on psychology can be traced back to the great Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Socrates. The modern psychology would probably emerge upon a Wilhelm Wundt's experiment in 1879 on the human mind's composition. This new perspective gave rise to psychology as an independent discipline. As the psychology discipline continues to evolve along time, several schools of thought have emerged. Among the major schools are structuralism, functionalism, psychoanalysis, behaviourism, cognitive, and humanism. Each school has its own dominance at its own period of time. The cumulative knowledge of the different schools adds on to better understanding of human thought and behavior. Different schools adopt its own perspectives, producing several psychology theories which stay popular until today. Some of the widely accepted research methods in psychological studies are correlation evaluations, experiments, and longitudinal researches.

History of Social Psychology

Early Influences

Aristotle believed that humans were naturally sociable, a necessity which allows us to live together, whilst Plato felt that the state controlled the individual and encouraged social responsibility through social context. Hegel (1770–1831) introduced the concept that society has inevitable links with the development of the social mind. This led to the idea of a group mind, important in the study of social psychology.

Lazarus & Steinthal wrote about Anglo-European influences in 1860. "Volkerpsychologie" emerged, which focused on the idea of a collective mind. It emphasized the notion that personality develops because of cultural and community influences, especially through language, which is both a social product of the community as well as a means of encouraging particular

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social thought in the individual. Therefore Wundt (1900–1920) encouraged the methodological study of language and its influence on the social being.

Early Experiments

There is some disagreement about the first true experiment, but the following are certainly among some of the most important. Triplett (1898) applied the experimental method to investigate the performance of cyclists and schoolchildren on how the presence of others influences overall performance – thus how individual's are affected and behave in the social context.

Later Developments

Much of the key research in social psychology developed following World War II, when people became interested in the behaviour of individuals when grouped together and in social situations. the social context and measured to ascertain whether change has occurred. Wider topics then began to emerge, such as social perception, aggression, relationships, decision making, pro social behaviour and attribution.

Thus the growth years of social psychology occurred during the decades following the 1940s.

List of social psychology theories

Social psychology utilizes a wide range of specific theories for various kinds of social and cognitive phenomena. Here is a sampling of some of the more influential theories that can be found in this branch of psychology.

Attribution theory – is concerned with the ways in which people explain (or attribute) the behaviour of others. The theory divides the way people attribute causes to events into two types. External or "situational" attributions assign causality to an outside factor, such as the weather. Internal or "dispositional" attributions assign causality to factors within the person, such as ability or personality.

Cognitive dissonance – was originally based on the concept of cognitive consistency, but is now more related to self-concept theory. When people do something that violates their view of themselves, this causes an uncomfortable state of dissonance that motivates a change in either attitudes or behaviour.

Drive theory – posits that the presence of an audience causes arousal which creates dominant or typical responses in the context of the situation.

Elaboration likelihood model – maintains that information processing, often in the case of a persuasion attempt can be divided into two separate processes based on the "likelihood of cognitive elaborations," that is, whether people think critically about the content of a message, or respond to superficial aspects of the message and other immediate cues.

Motivation crowding theory – suggests that extrinsic motivators such as monetary incentives or punishments can undermine (or, under different conditions, strengthen) intrinsic motivation.

Observational learning (social learning) – suggests that behaviour can be acquired by observation and imitation of others, unlike traditional learning theories which require reinforcement or punishment for learning to occur.

Positioning theory – focuses on the moral orders that occur in conversations as a result of the interplay between the speech-acts uttered, the positions taken and the developing story-line.



Schemata theory – focuses on "schemas" which are cognitive structures that organize knowledge and guide information processing. They take the form of generalized beliefs that can operate automatically and lead to biases in perception and memory.

Self-perception theory – emphasizes that we observe ourselves in the same manner that we observe others, and draw conclusions about our likes and dislikes. Extrinsic self perceptions can lead to the over-justification effect.

Self-verification theory – focuses on people's desire to be known and understood by others. The key assumption is that once people develop firmly held beliefs about themselves, they come to prefer that others see them as they see themselves.

Social comparison theory – suggests that humans gain information about themselves, and make inferences that are relevant to self-esteem, by comparison to relevant others.

Social exchange theory – is an economic social theory that assumes human relationships are based on rational choice and cost-benefit analyses. If one partner's costs begin to outweigh his or her benefits, that person may leave the relationship, especially if there are good alternatives available.

Social identity theory – was developed by Henri Tajfel and examines how categorizing people (including oneself) into in groups or out groups affects perceptions, attitudes, and behavior.

Social penetration theory – proposes that, as relationships develop, interpersonal communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more intimate ones. The theory was formulated by psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor in 1973 to provide an understanding of the closeness between two individuals.

Socioemotional selectivity theory – posits that as people age and their perceived time left in life decreases, they shift from focusing on information seeking goals to focusing on emotional goals.

System justification theory – proposes that people have a motivation to defend and bolster the status quo, in order to continue believing that their social, political, and economic systems are legitimate and just.

Terror management theory – suggests that human mortality causes existential dread and terror, and that much of human behavior exists as a buffer against this dread (e.g., self-esteem and worldviews).

Triangular theory of love – by Sternberg, characterizes love in an interpersonal relationship on three different scales: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Different stages and types of love can be categorized by different combinations of these three elements.

Conclusion

Social psychology is about understanding individual behaviour in a social context.' the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behaviour in social situations. It therefore looks at human behaviour as influenced by other people and the social context in which this occurs. Social psychologists therefore deal with the factors that lead us to behave in a given way in the presence of others, and look at the conditions under which certain behaviour/actions and feelings occur. Social psychology is to do with the way these feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions and goals are constructed and how such psychological factors, in turn, influence our interactions with others. social psychology include the self concept, social cognition, attribution theory, social influence, group processes, prejudice and discrimination, interpersonal processes, aggression, attitudes and stereotypes.



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