

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Social constructionist methodology in social psychology
- ☰ An Example of Methodology used in social constructionist psychology
- ☰ Analyzing six sets of meaning individually
- ☰ RESULT (a): The various elements of social constructionism as an alternative paradigm of social psychology that
- ☰ Results (b): Various facets of the meaning derived

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Social constructionist methodology in social psychology

- In this lecture, we will try to learn the methodology adopted in the social constructionist paradigm of social psychology.

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An Example of Methodology used in social constructionist psychology

- I, now, present a report of an activity that was organized in a psychology course that I teach at IIT Kanpur to understand the various facets of the social constructionist paradigm and to understand the meanings of 'relationship' amongst some IIT Kanpur students with the help of social constructionist methodology. I duly acknowledge the contributions of the student whose report I am citing below to highlight the various features of social constructionist paradigm and the procedures involved in applying social constructionist methodology.

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AIM : "To understand the meanings of 'relationship' among students with the help of social constructionist methodology"

PROCEDURE INVOLVED :

To understand the meaning of 'relationship' among students we used 'Social Constructionist Methodology'

which involved following steps :

- Writing one's own meanings
- Finding out commonalities and differences between one's own and partner's meanings
- Writing the commonalities and differences analyzed by us and then showing it to one's partner to check whether he/she agrees with us or not and also evaluating his/her understanding
- Writing one's understanding about whether one's partner was able to understand him/her or not.
- If not then again discussing with one's partner to make him understand whatever he/she understood wrong and also understand the meaning written by him completely. Repeat this, until convinced that one understands the meaning written by his/her partner.
- Now writing the meaning of relationship according to one's partner.
- Discussing in the group of FOUR students (two sets of partners working together) the commonalities and differences in the meanings.
- Each group writing the discussed meanings of 'relationship' and sharing these on black board and through e-mail with the other groups
- Finally, by analyzing these six sets of meanings, trying to understand the meanings of 'relationship' among students.

Analyzing six sets of meaning individually :

- **Set1 (mailed by Shikha Garg) :** Some people find that if they interact with others due to some professional reasons then also it is a relationship but others find that to name an interaction as relationship there need to be some kind of attachment between people.
This set of meaning implies that level of relationship depends on intimacy and closeness based on which each relation has a different significance in our life and even this level may differ from both sides. Thus here we get two viewpoints: According to one, relationship means any type of interaction. According to another viewpoint, we can only say there is a relationship if there is some sort of emotional attachment among people. Both viewpoints agree about what they mean by level of relationship.
- **Set2(mailed by Shantanu Mishra) :** This set of points reflect that this group thinks that if there is understanding between persons and there is no communication gap among persons then we can say that there exists good relationship among them. And to develop such a good relationship some sort of continuous interaction over a period of time is needed. Thus this group gives more views about what a good relationship is , but did not say anything about what they mean by only 'relationship' or does there exist term 'bad relationship' or not.
- **Set3 (mailed by Harsh Gupta) :** According to this group we can say there exists a relationship between two people if there is mutual understanding between them, they also expect some things from other, there is a two way communication among them and they understand each other completely. Also, relationship gets affected by the environment and previous experience with the person. Defining relationship in this way is too idealistic.
- **Set4 (mailed by Abhinav Gupta) :** Points given by this group show that basic meaning of relationship is same for all but people differ about what they mean by importance of duration and type of elationship. According to one group, relationship is a long bond, but other thinks that even a short bond may be a relationship. Also, if there is some negative feeling between two people, some people consider it as a part of negative relationship and other refuse to say it a relationship.
- **Set5 (mailed by Nitin V Tewari) :** This group supports the viewpoint that all types of interactions, whether temporary or permanent, results in a relationship and these relationships give us an identity. Kind of relationship depends on how we are connected to other person.
- **Set6 (mailed by Pranav Agrawal) :** Relationship can be defined as a connection between the people based on feelings which may be positive and negative resulting in positive or negative relationship. Feelings get influenced by level of interaction affecting strength of relationship. A relationship is positive if there is mutual trust, respect and caring among people and weakens if some expectations are not met or purpose not solved. This set of points is quite realistic.

RESULT (a): The various elements of social constructionism as an alternative paradigm of social psychology that

we learnt on 6 Jan, 2010 after following the initial few steps of this activity are :

- Ideas about relationship are not as concrete as we usually select it to be (we concluded this as we found that for some people it was not easy to decide what they mean by relationship.)
- Talk/sharing about relationship some social function to the partners in the communication (we concluded this as we found out that if almost all people in the class thought, their meanings might have been different while sharing the same with other people in other situations)
- Idea about relationship is more of a social construction (To understand what we mean by relationship, we need to focus on meaning system as it helps in understanding in a much better way)
- Co-constructing meaning (If there is a situation in which we were not able to understand one's partner after one discussion then we need to interview again and again and find what was missed last time)

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Results (b): Various facets of the meaning derived:

- A bond based on some common set of requirements like mutual understanding, care and concern, two way communication and so on. (This is a theme running in most sets of meaning.)
- Some sort of interaction is needed to have a relationship. (This is also a theme running in most sets of meaning.)
- Relationship may be of short duration or long duration, but what is important how we get connected with the people, we are interacting with (This theme was running only in some sets of meaning, yet it is a good point to consider the importance of duration)
- This is not necessary that the bond, we are talking about, is always positive. There may exist negative relationship. (This is an uncommon theme. But some of the people thought that negative feelings give rise to a particular type of relationship which can be considered as negative relationship. I found this meaningful)
- Relationship gives us an identity (This was an uncommon theme but yet it is true that our personality gets affected and even build by how we interact with the people and the people around us who have some relationship with us)

Further questions about student's meaning of relationship :

- The meaning given by one's partner may be quite negative as he/she may be having a different situation in his/her life. Like, he/she may be in a depression and when asked about what a relationship is, answer may be completely influenced by this and may change if the person is back to its' normal state after few days. How to identify and resolve this issue? Further questions about any other experience of human being related to some social issue, concern or problem:
- How being in an entirely new relationship may change our perception about relationship?