



Course Name Social Psychology

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Next ►

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Definitions of social psychology
- ☰ Scope of social psychology related to various definitions
- ☰ Premises of positivist social psychology
- ☰ Premises of the constructionist social psychology;

◀ Previous Next ▶

Definitions of social psychology

- A standard textbook definition of social psychology by Baron and Byrne (2000) emphasizes it as a scientific field that tends to understand nature and causes of individual behaviour and thought in social situations. This definition of social psychology is based on a philosophy of science that is largely known as positivism (or natural science tradition of science). Social psychology based on the positivist ideas assumes individuals as entities that are autonomous, independent of and separate from the environment.
- According to Kenneth Gergen (2009), one of the renowned social psychologists, however, social psychology must focus on the experiences and worldview of human beings in their socio-historical context through the meanings and discourses of the social world in which they live. This is known as the social constructionist paradigm of social psychology that is based on social constructionism, as a paradigm of science. For Gergen, social psychology may not provide meaningful and socially relevant insights into human life if it focuses exclusively on the human cognition and behaviour in social situations with an assumption that irrespective of diverse notions of selfhood and socio-historical contexts in which people's lived experiences are shaped, individuals' cognition and behaviour are guided by a motivation of seeking autonomy and control.



Scope of social psychology related to various definitions

- As per Baron and Byrne (2000), social psychology follows the natural science paradigm with a general set of methods to test and retest hypothesis with a focus on the behaviour of individual. In the subsequent lectures, many examples of experiments or other methods such as correlational method will throw light on how these methods would understand the impact of the situational and human trait-related factors on the behaviour of the individual.
- On the contrary, social constructionism, as another paradigm of social psychology, through its focus on the human experiences and worldviews in their context, promises to provide the understanding of human life that is close to their real-life setting. Such an approach requires a methodological shift towards innovative qualitative research that helps in co-constructing meanings through dialogic partnership with the research participants.
- Let us take a look at the premises of the positivist and constructionist social psychology.



Premises of positivist social psychology

- The traditional mainstream social psychology based on positivist paradigm tends to attribute causes of social behaviour and thought
 1. Action and characteristics of others
 2. Basic cognitive processes
 3. Ecological or environmental variables
 4. Biological factors/inheritance:

 **Previous** **Next** 

Premises of positivist social psychology (continued...)

1. Action and characteristics of others: Our social behaviours are contingent upon the type of others' action (e.g., aggression or appreciation) we face from others. Our behaviour towards these people are also dependent upon what kind of persons they are according to us. For example, an agitated person could be an old person, a child or a young lady. Our behaviour towards them often depends upon their characteristics.
2. Basic cognitive processes: Cognitive processes such as memory and reasoning may play a significant role in responding to others in a situation. For example, while responding to the agitated behaviour of a friend, we may like to recall under what circumstance, he/she might have behaved in a similar way in the past.
3. Ecological variables: Many variables related to the physical environment in which a person is placed, such as temperature, crowding, privacy (or its absence) etc. may be important determinants of some of our social behaviour.



Premises of positivist social psychology (continued...)

4. Biological factors/inheritance :

- Sociobiology: According to sociobiology, human beings' primary purpose of existence is to the serve our genes. Some basic examples of that may be observed in the loyalty to care that we feel towards our immediate family members. In animals, warning cries are supposed to save the members of the same species.
- Evolutionary social psychology: Evolutionary social psychology follows the law of natural selection (engaging in the behaviour that are the most adaptive from the point of view of survival) but also recognize the dependence of the adaptive behaviour on changing environmental or social conditions.

Premises of the constructionist social psychology

- The basic premises of the constructionist social psychology are oriented towards providing an alternative paradigm of psychological science that focuses on the experiences and discourses rather than behaviour manipulated by the experimenter. Following are the premises :
1. Experiences or behaviour in social situations are not outcomes of mental processes ready to be studied objectively.
 2. Experiences and the ways they are shared through are socially constructed. These depend not only on the ways we have been socialized but also the socio-historical context in which the person is living.
 3. Primary function of talk is not to represent a talk-independent reality but to initiate or regulation some social action. Therefore, for example, when a person shares his or her ideas about happiness or suffering, he or she is also acting out social roles and the shared ideas may be different depending upon the social roles into which the person is placed.
 4. If the above is true, then in exploring a person's experiences in constructionist version of social psychology, the act of sharing must serve the purpose of 'finding a voice' for the sharer. This is the foundation of trust on which the sharing in research interaction is based.