

# SOCI 323

# Social Psychology

## Session 1 – The Science of Social Life

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# Session Overview

This session seeks to:

- introduce students to the subject of Social Psychology.
- define the concepts of Social Psychology
- explain the scientific basis of Social Psychology
- mention and explain the goals of Social psychology
- identify the subject matter of Social

It is expected that at the end of the session, the student would be able to:

- list the key characteristics of Social Psychology
- identify and explain the factors that make Social Psychology scientific in nature
- quote others' definitions of Social Psychology and be able to provide a critique of these definitions
- provide your own definition of the subject.
- identify the goals and subject matter of Social Psychology

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Definition of Social Psychology
- Core Dimensions of Social Psychology
- Goals of Social Psychology
- The relevance of the Goals to social interaction
- The Subject Matter of Social Psychology
- Sample Question
- Some of the factors that influence human behaviour
- Summary of Session

# Reading List

- Read chapter one (1) and twelve (12) of the required text and the journal article posted on Sakai for this session.

Topic One

# DEFINING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



# What is Social Psychology?

- Our attempt at a definition will be helped by breaking up the words of the course title into “Social” and “Psychology”.
- Psychology has been said generally to be the study of life. According to Lahey, Psychology is “**the science of behavior and mental processes”.**
- The underlined words are crucial to our understanding of Social Psychology. These words are “**Science**’, ‘**Behavior**”, and ‘**Mental Processes**’.



# Defining Social Psychology-the Science

- Science specifically refers to **(a) a set of values and (b) several methods to study to study various topics**. Thus, if Social Psychology adopts this approach of applying specific values and methods to study specific social phenomena, it could be said to be scientific in nature.
- These four values that all fields must employ to be considered scientific are
  - **(a) Accuracy (b) Objectivity (c) Skepticism and (d) Open-mindedness.**
- **Accuracy-** refers to adopting a means of obtaining and evaluating information in a precise, exact and correct manner.
- **Objectivity** refers to obtaining and assessing information without any bias whatsoever. It implies going to the field to collect data without any preconceived notions or ideas. Simply it is the absence of subjectivity in the process of data gathering and analysis.

# The Science of Social Psychology ii

- **Skepticism** implies having a critical mind and a questioning attitude. Thus, the situation where you don't just accept things on face value but you question and ask for proof for facts that are presented on any matter. It is accepting information only after consistent verification of those facts.
- **Open-Mindedness**- as the word implies suggests the absence of fanatical or myopic view of things. This value implies that based on the availability of new evidence one is willing to change his stance on a subject, until further evidence is available.
- Therefore, in the sense that Social Psychology adopts these values, it is scientific in orientation and nature. An effective employment and application of these values helps Social Psychology to obtain its goals which we shall discuss shortly in the next section.



# Defining Social Psychology-the Mental Processes

- The next underlined word: **mental processes** refers to the private thoughts, emotions, feelings, and /or motives of the individual that are intangible and cannot be directly observed. **Behavior** refers to all of a persons' overt actions that can be observed.
- Putting all these together, we can then simply say that Psychology is **studying the behavior (overt actions) and mental processes (thoughts, motives, emotions, feelings) of individuals scientifically.**

# Defining Social Psychology-the Social

- Simply when we introduce ‘Social’ with Psychology, we are introducing others and society. It is a description that is concerned with understanding **how** and **why** individuals **think, feel** and **behave** as they do in **settings involving others**.
- Social Psychology then can be explained as a scientific attempt to understand the causes of individuals thinking processes and behavior in social situations.

# Definitions of Social Psychology

- The scientific study of the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of individuals in social situations (Gilovich, Keltner, Chen and Nisbett, 2016)
- “ the scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior and thoughts in social situations’ (**Baron, Byrne and Branscombe, 2006**)
- “ the Scientific study of the way in which peoples’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors are influenced by the *real* or **imagined** presence of other people” (**Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2007**)
- “ the Scientific discipline that attempts to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behavior of other individuals are influenced by the **actual, imagined or implied** presence of others”(Franzoi, 2000)

# Core Dimensions of Social Psychology

- That Social Psychology is a science:
- That Social Psychology seeks to understand peoples thoughts, feelings and motives.
- That Social Psychology seeks to understand peoples actions and behavior.
- That Social Psychology seeks to understand how an individual's thoughts and actions are influenced by the people s/he interacts with.
- That Social Psychology may involve interactions with actual, implied or imagined others.

# Sample Question

- From the foregoing, how would you define Social Psychology in your own words?

Topic Two

# THE GOALS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



# The Goals of Social Psychology

- The main effort in Social Psychology is to obtain knowledge that will help us to:
  - **Describe,**
  - **Understand,**
  - **Predict and**
  - **Influence** the behavior and mental processes of individuals



# Relevance of Goals to Social Interaction

- Knowing and applying the goals as listed above aids our interactions with others to a large extent.
- Simply, if we take time to:
  - describe others behavior, and attempt to
  - find explanations for why they said or did something, we could
  - predict their future behavior and
  - ensure that those behaviors are curbed (if they are negative) or repeated to the mutual benefit of all (if they are positive).



Topic Three

# THE SUBJECT MATTER OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



# The Subject Matter of Social Psychology

- The **individual** is the emphasis and interest of Social Psychologists. The focus is to understand the factors which shape the **individual's thoughts, feelings and actions**.
- The orientation and approach is to determine things from a minute, micro perspective and not the macro (collectivities).
- Societies vary in terms of the levels of violence, yet it is individuals who perform aggressive acts or refrain from doing so. Again societies differ in terms of their views concerning marriage and courtship, yet it is individuals that get attracted to others, fall in love and marry.
- Thus, thoughts occur in the minds of individuals and actions are performed by individuals (Baron et al, 2006).



Topic Four

# **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE BEHAVIOUR**



# Factors that Influence Behaviour

- The behavior of other persons
- The characteristics of others
- Biological Factors
- Cultural Factors
- Ecological Factors
- Cognitive Processes
- NOTE: many of the factors that influence us are hidden (not presented in visible conscious and verbal forms but in nonconscious, nonverbal forms accessible to introspection).



# Summary of Session

In this session, we have learnt that:

- Social Psychology seeks to understand the causes of human thoughts and behavior in social situations.
- Social Psychologists seek to accomplish this goal through the use of scientific principles and methods.
- The factors that shape our thoughts, emotions and behavior are shaped by a wide range of cognitive, biological, social, cultural and environmental factors

# References

- Robert, B. and Branscombe, N. (2012). Social Psychology. 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2007) Social Psychology. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2010) Social Psychology. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

