

Social/Organizational Aspects of Behavior

The establishment of social psychology as an official specialty was delayed due to the academic environment at the time. Psychological research had been focused on the human mind, studied in laboratory settings. However, as the field of sociology became more established, it gradually merged with psychology to create the blended specialty. The development of social psychology was influenced by contributions by Luther Bernard and Floyd Allport, a sociologist and psychologist (respectively) who helped to transition the field from the experimental trends of the time. Although Allport's writing was more experimentally focused, it was directly linked to the emergence of social psychology and subsequently, many signs began to appear of its increasing vitality (Hilgard, 1987, p. 581).

After World War II, two important aspects of the field began to emerge: action research and group dynamics. Action research was linked to problem solving and public action, and group dynamics was linked to group factors such as cohesiveness, decision-making, and identification. Despite significant research that had been conducted during the WWII and post-WWII era, social psychology still suffered difficulties as an academic field. More specifically, attempts at integration between sociology and psychology at the university level. One example of this attempt was at the University of Michigan around the 1950s, which was the second university-level attempt to fuse the two disciplines. Ultimately, the interdisciplinary social psychology program dissolved due to both the disproportionate number of psychologists and the irreconcilable differences between figures in the two departments (Hilgard, 1987).

In the last few decades, the field continued to face periods of fragmentation. However, more recent integration of social psychology has led to adoption of group as well as individual issues, and there has been a movement toward incorporating factors such as majority/minority attitude formation (Crano & Prislin, 2006) and culture (Hilgard, 1987; Kitayama, 2006). According to Kitayama (2006), social psychology has evolved to become a study of mutual influence between psychology and culture. Cognitive and social areas of psychology have been a complementary blend; for example, restaurant scripts involve both scripts (cognitive) and social (restaurant situation) components. More cognitive-focused theories, such as cognitive dissonance, were more recently considered to differ cross-culturally; for example in Japan, there was failure to replicate the theory.

Cultural factors can also be examined in conjunction with group variables. Peter Hegarty (2006) of the University of Surrey discussed theories that may account for visual and verbal representations for what is normal and abnormal. Norm theory, developed by Kahneman & Miller, states that references to category labels recruit exemplars, which are then averaged to form category norms. Exemplars that are excluded are considered mutable and surprising, while those that are included become default standards. A study of normativity in terms of celebrity race was conducted to illustrate this theory. College-aged participants were found to have the default representation of golfers as White men. Race was mentioned when participants were asked to describe an atypical representation (e.g., Tiger Woods), but not when asked to describe a typical representation (i.e., White male). In terms of gender differences, when asked about the typical voter 90% mentioned males in their description. Teachers were also more likely to be seen as male, and professors were more likely seen as female. In all studies, people focused on the atypical group in explaining differences in sexual orientation, race, and nation. Generalization was more likely to be used when describing an ingroup versus an outgroup. Also, one

group can be both a visuo-spatial and linguistic norm. Hegarty (2006) explained that the picture of man can be a norm for both females and males, such as on a bathroom door.

Integration with areas such as developmental psychology is also present in social research. In a talk by Nancy Hill (2006), titled "Disentangling, ethnicity, and SES for understanding parenting: Interactions, influences, and meaning", culture was seen as a central component of integrative developmental models. That is, variables of the integrative theory are believed to be mediated by culture; they are all filtered through culture to affect child outcome. Hill examined Boykin's Triple Quandary Theory when studying the relationship between ethnicity and SES, which states that there are three distinct cultural realms: mainstream, minority, and Afro-cultural. She also examined the Developmental Niche Theory, which was also composed of three parts: physical and social environment, culturally-regulated customs of child care, and ethnotheories of the caretaker. Currently, SES may be confounded with ethnicity. Within-group differences are ignored, as there is a tendency to compare between groups. Two studies attempted to disentangle SES and ethnicity (African-American, Mexican-American, and Euro-American) by comparing parenting with mental health outcomes, as well as with academic adjustment outcomes. For African-American and Euro-American families, there are no mean differences in parenting style when range of SES are matched. Results of the comparison between parenting and academic achievement found differences depending on whether parental involvement occurred in the home or school setting. In home settings, the relation between the two variables differed across income levels but not ethnicity. However, greater parental involvement in school settings was linked with higher achievement only for African-Americans.

As evidenced by the studies mentioned, integration of variables such as culture is important in the future outlook of the field of social psychology. Researchers at the University of Michigan have had a track record of groundbreaking research with this type of interdisciplinary work. Markus and Kitayama were some of the earliest leaders of the field, examining cross-cultural differences in social psychology between Japan and the United States. Research on the concepts of independence and interdependence, as well as individualism and collectivism are projected to continue with the growth of the field (Kitayama, 2006). The origins of American individualism is a major current research area identified by Kitayama and is only in its beginning stages. Possible directions include the issues of voluntary settlement, both in the U.S. and cross-culturally. Other issues of future research include cross-cultural definitions of mental disorder, such as depression and suicidality in Japan, which would have important implications for clinical psychology as well. U.S. cultural issues are also being addressed in ongoing social psychological research, such as the study of stereotype activation and the psychological effects of social stigma (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Exploring the factors involved in threats to personal and social identity can be helpful in understanding individual differences in stereotyping and prejudice.

Issues more organizational psychological in nature are also promising avenues for future research and can have direct implications on economic productivity. Group motivational factors play a central role in these processes, in addition to individual motivational factors such as job satisfaction and positive mood (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Brief & Weiss, 2002). Ongoing research on affect has moved toward a more complex examination of process but continues to be directly influenced by basic emotion research (Brief & Weiss, 2002). This suggests potential for future interdisciplinary research with emerging areas such as neuroimaging and emotion regulation.

References

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